

# Nazism in Syria and Lebanon

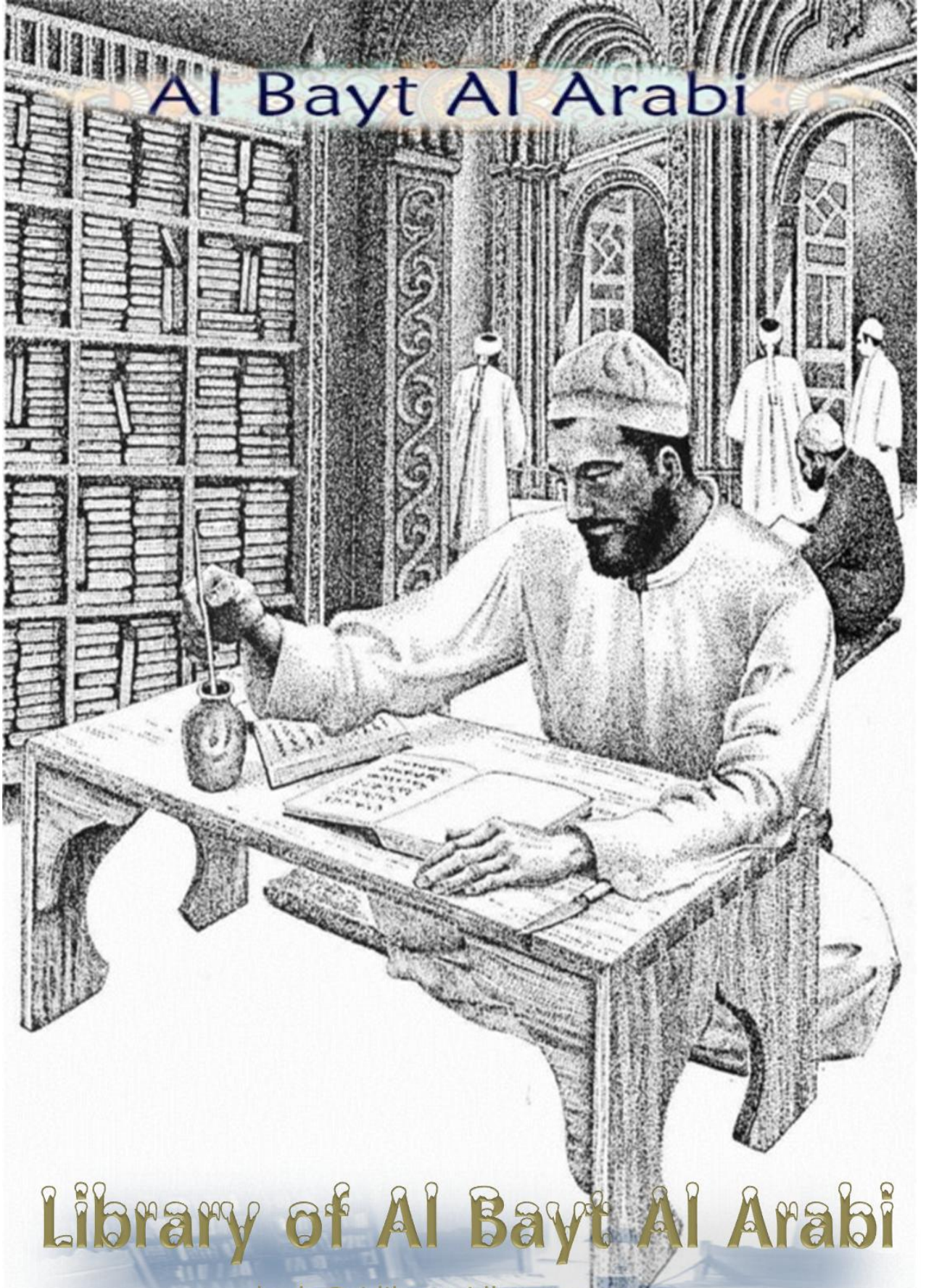
The ambivalence of the German  
option, 1933–1945

**Götz Nordbruch**



SOAS/Routledge Studies on the Middle East

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# Nazism in Syria and Lebanon

The increasingly vibrant political culture emerging in Lebanon and Syria in the 1930s and early 1940s is key to the understanding of local approaches towards the Nazi German regime. For many contemporary observers in Beirut and Damascus, Nazism not only posed a risk to Europe, but threatened to take root in Arab societies as well.

In the first publication to reconstruct Lebanese and Syrian encounters with Nazism in the context of an evolving local political culture and to base its analysis on a comprehensive review of Arab, French and German sources, Götz Nordbruch examines the reactions to the rise of Nazism in the countries under French mandate, spanning from fascination and endorsement to the creation of antifascist networks.

Against a background of public discourses, local politics and the shifting regional and international settings, this book interprets public assessments of and contact with the Nazi regime as part of an intellectual quest for orientation in the years between the break-up of the Ottoman Empire and national independence.

**Götz Nordbruch** is research associate at the IREMAM, Aix-en-Provence, France. His research interests include the history of Arab-European relations and the development of modern Arab political culture.

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The ambivalence of the German option, 1933–1945

*Götz Nordbruch*

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First published 2009

by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada

by Routledge

270 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2008.

“To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or Routledge’s collection of thousands of eBooks please go to [www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk](http://www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk).”

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*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

Goetz, Nordbruch, 1974–

Nazism in Syria and Lebanon: the ambivalence of the German option, 1933–1945 / Goetz Nordbruch.

p. cm. – (Soas/routledge studies on the middle east; 8)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Syria – Foreign relations – Germany. 2. Germany – Foreign relations – Syria.
3. Lebanon – Foreign relations – Germany. 4. Germany – Foreign relations – Lebanon.
5. National socialism – Syria. 6. National socialism – Lebanon. I. Title.

DS95.6.G3G64 2008

327.430569109’043 – dc22

2008019406

ISBN 0-203-88856-1 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN 10: 0-415-45714-9 (hbk)

ISBN 10: 0-203-88856-1 (ebk)

ISBN 13: 978-0-415-45714-9 (hbk)

ISBN 13: 978-0-203-88856-8 (ebk)

Submitted as doctoral dissertation: Berlin, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Phil Fak III, Diss., 2007.

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# Acknowledgements

A number of people and institutions supported this study. I am grateful to Peter Heine and Stefan Wild who were supervising my PhD thesis, from which this book evolved. At the outset of my research, I received invaluable advice from Gerhard Höpp. He was so kind as to share many ideas and information. His private papers, which are preserved at the Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin, are a treasure trove for anyone researching Arab–German relations. Randi Deguilhem and Hélène Hawad-Claudot allowed me to join their research programme on public opinion in the Arab world. I profited a great deal from the workshops held within the context of this programme.

The Friedrich Ebert Foundation granted me generous financial support, which helped me to concentrate on research and writing without the pressure of earning a living. The staff of the IFPO-library (Damascus), the archives of the Ministère des Affaires Etrangères (Nantes), the political archives of the Auswärtige Amt (Berlin), and of the press archives at the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies (Tel Aviv) were extremely supportive; moreover, it was a great pleasure to use these facilities.

I would like to express my gratitude to Ulrike Freitag and Benjamin C. Fortna for accepting my manuscript for publication. I also wish to thank the staff of Routledge for all the efforts they put into this book.

I received numerous valuable suggestions, information and contacts. Abdallah Hanna, Samar Abou-Zeid, Carla Eddé, Israel Gershoni, Wolfgang G. Schwanitz, Tilman Luedke, René Wildangel, Dennis Kumetat, Karim Mroué and Ziyad Muna were particularly helpful. My thanks are also expressed to Inès-Leïla Dakhli and Jennifer Dueck for their willingness to share with me their – at that point still unpublished – theses.

Special thanks are reserved for Marc Schindler, Thérèse Bedout, Barbara Fried, Mirjam Gläser, Tino Fleischer, and particularly for Anne Françoise Weber, who helped me to turn my ideas into text. I also owe a great debt to all those friends who agreed to transport thousands of copies and numerous books from Damascus, Beirut and Tel Aviv to Berlin and to Marseille. I am aware of the problems that such luggage – books and journals in Arabic featuring images of Hitler, Stalin, and de Gaulle, let alone swastikas – might provoke at today's Middle Eastern borders.

Finally, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my parents, Bärbel und Hartmut Nordbruch. They know best what they contributed to the conclusion of this book. And to Sandra Bedout: she accompanied this study from the very beginning, in Lebanon, Syria, Israel, Germany, and France. I could not expect better encouragement and support.

# **Note on transcription**

I followed the system of the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES) to transcribe Arabic words. Personal names that are familiar to the non-Arab public are given in Latin letters. The same rule applies to common geographical names. The prefix ‘al-’ in names is used only when the full name of a person is mentioned.

# Abbreviations

AA	Auswärtiges Amt, Germany
AAPA	Auswärtiges Amt, Politisches Archiv
ANP	Arab Nationalist Party (al-ḥizb al-qawmī al-‘arabī)
BarchP	Bundesarchiv Potsdam
CGB	Consulate General in Beirut
CAOM	Centre des Archives d’Outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence
DNB	Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro
HP	Private Papers Gerhard Höpp
IAC	Italian Armistice Commission
LNA	League of National Action (‘uṣbat al-‘amal al-qawmī)
MAE	Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, France
NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei
NSDAP/AO	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei/ Auslandsorganisation
OKW	Oberkommando der Wehrmacht
PPS [= SNP]	Parti Populaire Syrien (Syrian Nationalist Party)
SGA	Sûreté Générale aux Armées
SNP	Syrian Nationalist Party (al-ḥizb al-sūrī al-qawmī)
SSL	Services Spéciaux du Levant

# 1 Introduction

Attraction to foreign countries can take on bizarre forms; the files of the German Consulate General in Beirut of the 1930s provide numerous examples. In February 1935, the consulate received a letter from a German student asking for advice:

In June of this year, I am intending – accompanied by my brother (two students) – to start a bicycle ride from Berlin to Constantinople, Trebizond, Tabriz, Mosul, Baghdad, Damascus, and from there to Palestine. We did similar trips in the past, so we are no newcomers to life on the road.

We would like to ask you for the following information: 1.) Is the *chaussée* between Baghdad and Damascus suitable for bicycles? 2.) Is there regular car traffic on this road, and what would be the costs for one trip (in European currency)? 3.) Is the new route (along the pipeline) between Kirkuk and Beirut in a better state? 4.) Is this area dangerous due to [the presence] of ‘robbers’ and other bad persons or animals? 5.) Is it necessary to learn Arabic?

Thank you very much in advance and looking forward to meet you personally on the trip.

Heil Hitler! Hansjürgen Büniger<sup>1</sup>

The consulate’s reply was formal, yet revealed a certain consternation.

A letter addressed to Reich Chancellor Adolf Hitler in July 1933 also provoked consternation. Sheikh Raḥḥāl Shaybān, the chief of a Bedouin tribe in the region of Baalbek, declared:

I am praying for you on a daily basis. Your Excellency’s love for your country leaves profound impressions in the world. Your deeds are preserved in history; no one in the West achieved anything similar before. At any given moment, I am prepared to serve your government with 100 horsemen; I am just waiting for your signal.<sup>2</sup>

In correspondence with German officials in Berlin and Jerusalem, the German consulate in Beirut tried to assess the sheikh’s intentions and make sense of his proposal. Weeks later in September and after considerable consultation, a decision was finally taken not to answer and pass over the sheikh’s offer in silence.<sup>3</sup>

## 2 *Introduction*

The consulate's work was not limited to such dubious correspondence. In fact, the consulate was an important interlocutor shaping the image of the Nazi German regime among the local population. In striking contrast to the impression given by the sheikh's proposal, debates in Syria and Lebanon about Nazi Germany and its ideology were anything but naive; in general, they were well informed, passionate – and increasingly controversial. Not surprisingly, these debates affected the stances adopted by local political players towards the German regime and its representatives. As a state that was challenging the European order – and thus weakening the position of France and Britain, the colonial powers dominating the Middle East – Nazi Germany inevitably triggered controversies.

The period of National Socialist rule from 1933–1945 left discernible traces among the Lebanese and Syrian public; these traces reveal conflicting assessments and often contradictory approaches to the new power. That said, historical relations and mutual references between the two French-mandated territories of Lebanon and Syria on the one hand and Nazi Germany on the other have only received very limited attention in the historiography of the region. This lack of research is even more surprising as assessments of the 1930s and 1940s, which are provided in contemporary writings, are often poles apart. While it is generally agreed that fascination for the new German regime was widespread, interpretations of this fascination remain in dispute.

Yet, one of the striking facets of retrospective accounts of Arab–Nazi German relations is the commonality of an assumption according to which Arabs traditionally held sympathetic views for Germany and German rulers. It is important to call this assumption into question. Not only had many Arab nationalists during the First World War bitterly fought the Ottoman army, an ally of Germany; even more importantly, local observers hardly ignored the darker sides of German politics. While German strategies in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth might have been more subtle than those pursued by France, Britain, and Italy, it did not escape the local public's attention that the respective German regimes pursued concrete economic, cultural, and strategic goals that did not necessarily match the interests of the Arab population. Germany was hardly above suspicion; in fact, Arab reactions to the massacres of the Armenians during the First World War are merely one example to illustrate existing concerns about German politics and ambitions. Given the public horror at the killings, reports about a German role in these events, as published in the Syrian press during spring 1918, contradict common assumptions about a timeless Arab fascination for the German nation.<sup>4</sup> Arab perceptions of Germany, it should be stressed from the outset, did not blindly submit to nostalgic and elated sentiments for an old friend.

### **Nazism and the mandates: approaches to the subject and research questions**

Since the mid-1920s, the rise of the National Socialist movement had prompted controversial reactions within the Arab public. Such diverse assessments of Nazism were not 'imported' from a European cultural context to the Arab-Islamic

Middle East. Originating from within the specific socio-economic transformations of the region, they mirrored original intellectual appropriations of the challenges of the time. In this respect, references to European history and to intellectual products of European provenance only added to an increasingly complex spectrum of political and religious ideas evolving during the interwar years.

Popular opinion about National Socialist Germany was not primarily due to specific propagandistic interventions led by representatives of the new German regime. In spite of considerable efforts to spread information about Nazi ideology and politics, during the early years of Hitler's rule, Germany's strategy vis-à-vis the local public had remained restrained, and in most cases reactive. Within the triangle of German, French, and Arab actors, German–French relations and the implied interests and strategies were decisive for any German engagement towards the Arab population living under French rule. In addition, popular perceptions of Nazi Germany were closely tied to the developments in the French administered mandates, and more often than not reflected interpretations and assessments of local society itself. Public opinion on Nazi Germany implied immediate messages with regard to the French authorities and their administration of the mandates.

### *Arab–German encounters in historical research*

Historical research on Arab–German relations during the Third Reich has, in the recent past, been considerably extended. This research has not only brought to light additional details about specific aspects of these relations, but also provided new perspectives that had long been neglected. Until the late 1980s, National Socialist strategies towards the Arab Middle East were at the core of most studies.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, the Arab side of Arab–German relations received far less attention. While few studies have been published on the Palestinian Mufti Amīn al-Ḥusaynī and few other key actors, perceptions of Nazism among the broader Arab public have rarely been investigated. Substantial studies have only appeared over the last decade; they trace echoes of National Socialist thought and politics not only among the political elites, but also in other spectra of society. Focusing on Egypt, Palestine, Iraq, and Morocco, these works reveal the importance of such research that helps with assessing the political and intellectual reasoning on the Arab side of Arab–German encounters.<sup>6</sup>

A stated aim of these studies is to question a recurring description of Palestinian Mufti Amīn al-Ḥusaynī as representing *the* Arab stance towards Nazism, reflecting ideological convictions and political interests that were supposedly shared by the broader Arab public. As has been argued by René Wildangel, Ḥusaynī's was neither the sole voice to be heard, nor was his reasoning an inevitable product of contemporary intellectual thought.<sup>7</sup> In fact, a key finding of latest research is the diversity of approaches towards Nazism amongst the respective publics. These approaches depended not only on political and intellectual affiliations, but also on the specific historical conditions in which they evolved.

Such diversity only adds to the persistent question about how to interpret the respective stances and how to relate them to the social, political, and ideological



#### 4 Introduction

context of the time. Existing research differs considerably with regard to these interpretations. A central paradigm that was formulated in one of the earliest studies dealing with the Arab side of Arab–German encounters focuses on the ideological and political premises that obstructed all-out Arab endorsements of the Nazi regime. Tracing Arab approaches to Nazi politics in the pre-war years, Francis Nicosia identified an ‘ideological and strategic incompatibility’<sup>8</sup> of Arab nationalist aspirations with National Socialist politics. In the light of Nazi Germany’s reluctance to support Arab nationalist demands, Nicosia emphasized the conflict of interests between the two sides. In contrast, Basheer M. Nafi questions the very existence of ideological reasoning underlying these relations: ‘Almost all the Arab leaders who became involved in the Arab–Axis imbroglio were men of practical politics, with little affinity for ideological complexities.’<sup>9</sup> Nafi’s conclusion that pro-German declarations were in fact expressions of *realpolitik* rather than of ideology resonates with the saying of ‘the enemy of my enemy is my friend’, which continues to be alluded to in interpretations of Arab–German relations. Other research, however, questions such assumptions of purely strategic interests that guided Arab approaches. Tracing the echoes of National Socialist thought amongst various political currents, Stefan Wild, for instance, draws attention to the considerable appeal of Nazism amongst different political parties and actors. Authoritarian sentiments and nationalist fervour that were entertained in certain circles are identified by Wild as catalysts for a widespread fascination with the new German regime. Yet, notwithstanding the considerable echo of National Socialist views, which was facilitated by anti-Jewish sentiments in the Arab public, Wild stresses that profound ideological and strategic obstacles remained, thus preventing Nazism from having any major impact amongst the Arab populations.<sup>10</sup> Different, again, is a recent assessment provided by Peter Wien. Focusing on Iraq, Wien analyses Arab–German relations in the context of a generational conflict between emerging radical circles of a new urban middle class and the still dominant, Ottoman-educated elite. While authoritarian and totalitarian thought resounded in the politics and thoughts of this young *effendiyya*, Wien concludes that any resemblance to European fascist movements was phenomenological: ‘[A] proper term for the references to authoritarian, totalitarian, or fascist principles is “flirting with Fascist Imagery”. There was no direct adoption of fascist thought.’<sup>11</sup>

#### *Arab encounters with Nazi Germany in the Levantine context*

These assessments are echoed in the limited body of research dedicated to Arab encounters with Nazism in Syria and Lebanon. While the politics of Amīn al-Ḥusaynī in Palestine and Rashīd ‘Alī al-Kaylānī in Iraq have been studied in detail, similar studies with regard to Syrian and Lebanese political actors are rare. Syrian and Lebanese personalities figured much less prominently in these relations. While several representatives of local organizations were in direct contact with German officials, cooperation in no way reached the extent of Ḥusaynī’s and Kaylānī’s collaboration with the Axis. Referring to these relations between Nazi

Germany and Lebanese and Syrian actors, Itamar Rabinovich tellingly declared: 'It is ... largely a story of things that did not happen.'<sup>12</sup>

With Lebanon and Syria, interest has focused primarily on the Lebanese youth organization *Katā'ib*, a predominately Maronite formation established in autumn 1936, and the Syrian Nationalist Party that was created in 1932 as a clandestine organization amongst students of the American University of Beirut. Additional attention has been paid to the early Ba'ṯh party, whose organizational origins date back to spring 1941. Interest in these groups, however, was not triggered by substantial ties linking these organizations to Nazi Germany; instead, attention was primarily due to the stylistic and ideological resemblances that called for further inquiries into the substance of these allusions to National Socialist organization and thought.<sup>13</sup>

The lack of existing research on Syrian and Lebanese encounters with Nazism facilitated the adoption of a perspective that differs from previous studies of Arab–German relations. The decision to scrutinize 'encounters' rather than 'relations' reflects the intention to take on a broader perspective. Most previous studies tend either to focus on organizational contacts between the two sides or to trace influences of National Socialist ideology among local Arab parties and personalities. This study aims to integrate these approaches. Organizational relations with outside powers were obviously influenced by public opinion about the respective regimes. Although the public was largely excluded from the political decision-making process, the impact of popular perceptions of international powers clearly limited the options of local political players in their strategic manoeuvring with foreign states and movements. This kind of impact of public opinion on the legitimacy of international relations was not restricted to the case of Nazi Germany; public opinion no less impacted on relations with Kemalist Turkey, the Hashemite dynasty, Bolshevik Russia – and with France. While hostile views vis-à-vis certain states did not necessarily preclude the forging of strategic alliances, in the light of an increasingly politicized public, strategic reasoning alone was hardly sufficient to determine political decisions and to legitimize political action.

In an attempt to tackle these factors that were shaping local encounters with the German regime, this study aims to avoid the pitfalls of state- or institution-centred perspectives on the one hand, and depoliticized understandings of society and public discourses on the other. Focusing on the public as a multifaceted battlefield where decisions regarding the future of society were played out, state structures as well as formal and informal groupings are considered as having an impact on political choices. In this regard, the press is only one factor shaping and mirroring the setting of political courses.

On another level, this study is situated in the context of ongoing debates that have called into question the classic approach to the study of international relations. With regard to colonial and colonized states, research has long considered the colonial state the sole actor within the relationship. While such a perspective has been discredited, the underlying assumption of two politically and culturally separate entities that are bound in formal international relations can still be found in debates about cultural transfer and political interaction.

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In this respect, the academic debates concerning an appropriate characterization of local Lebanese and Syrian organizations such as the *Katā'ib*, the SNP, and the early Ba'th Party allow for an illustration of the limits of this understanding, and the necessity for leaving behind the assumption of culturally authentic entities. Given the ideological provenance of fascist movements in modern European societies, it is frequently argued that a transposition of such terms as 'fascism' to the Arab Middle East risks imposing European analytical concepts on culturally different contexts. As an extension of this objection, echoes of fascism are often interpreted in terms of 'ideological imports', thus assuming a rather superficial adoption of culturally foreign ideas.

Such arguments are based on an idea of culturally rooted, nationally authentic thought with limited geographical outreach. This implicit postulate will be questioned in this study. In the light of available research and the various controversies that have shaped the debates about Arab approaches to Nazism, the aim is to reconstruct encounters with Nazi Germany as expressions of local conditions in the two Levantine countries. Given the state of these societies during the interwar years, references – affirmative or negative, in thought or political action – to National Socialist ideology and politics will be analysed as functions of local political culture under French rule. The starting point of this study is the assumption that the impact of an ideology or idea, e.g. Nazism, emerges not only on the basis of its match with traditional cultural or religious concepts. Rather, it is the potential provision of answers to social and political challenges at a particular moment that determines the impact. In other words, the promotion of Nazism through National Socialist propaganda in Lebanon and Syria – as anywhere else – found its limits not so much in its adaptability to existing patterns of thoughts and local convictions; what was more important was the suitability of Nazism as a solution to evolving challenges and conflicts shaping the new social and political context in the Levant. Hence, the primary goal of this study is neither to identify similarities and differences between local and National Socialist actors and thoughts; nor is it the aim to determine if this or that formation or organization should be depicted as 'fascist' or 'Nazi'. The main interest is to reconstruct local encounters with Nazism as reflections of local political culture, thus rendering visible key political questions and intellectual challenges that facilitated the resonance of National Socialist ideology and politics in contemporary Levantine societies.

Consequently, three research questions guided this study:

1. What knowledge about Nazism and its politics was available and to whom? Given the complexity of National Socialist ideology, it is important for an assessment of local references to Nazism to consider the available information on which these references were based.
2. The second question relates to the practical positioning of the various political actors – organizations as well as individual personalities – vis-à-vis Germany and its representatives: What reasoning underpinned their approaches, and how were these approaches justified both to German interlocutors and to the local public? While references to the German regime in the form of

actual contacts and personal relations were often linked to strategic decisions, it is important to note that such choices were rarely made in an ideological vacuum. In fact, as a perceptual screen, ideology obviously framed concrete political moves.

3. In this regard, a third question is posed with the aim of identifying the echoes of National Socialist thought in local intellectual discourses: Which aspects of Nazism were referred to and how were these references related to the existing set of discourses occupying the local public? Reflecting public opinion and popular perceptions, such controversies and debates shaped and limited the spectrum of strategic options available to local actors.

It is important to keep in mind that during these years Nazism was just one intellectual and political reference among others; while references to Nazism prominently found resonance with the local public, similar studies with regard to echoes of Italian Fascism, Kemalism, and Bolshevism, or of the ideas of the French Revolution would prove no less interesting. Yet, in the light of the crucial importance of Nazism as a radical nationalist, authoritarian, and expansionist movement that was to determine the path of history not only in Europe, but in the Middle East as well, an inquiry into its impacts in the Lebanese and Syrian contexts allows for a particular insight into the challenges and transformation of contemporary political culture. In this regard, a study of local encounters with Nazism is not only revealing about nationalist and authoritarian extremes; as shown by Israel Gershoni in a study on Egypt, research into the echoes of Nazism also provides a crucial insight into those facets of local political culture that put National Socialist premises into question:

[I]n the specific context of the era, a crucial key to our understanding of the intellectual elite's position in relation to liberalism as a distinct system of values, and as a basis for a political culture and government, can be found in the attitudes it developed towards fascism and Nazism.<sup>14</sup>

### **Parties, public, and the civic order: the historical context of Lebanon and Syria during the interwar years**

The global turmoil caused by the First World War did not spare the Levantine regions of Lebanon and Syria. The devastating war left its marks on the collective memory of a population dispersed and decimated by battles, hunger, and diseases.<sup>15</sup> The establishment of a French mandatory regime hardly matched the expectations and demands voiced by the local populations. Facing the new realities after the break-up of the Ottoman Empire and the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924, societies in Syria and Lebanon had to adapt to a new regional and international setting. Conflicting messages from the imperial powers further intensified local political battles and intellectual debates. The 'fourteen points' declaration of US President Woodrow Wilson in support of national sovereignty and the October Revolution in Russia, but even more importantly the undisguised colonial

aspirations pursued by European powers, triggered the intellectual struggles for up-to-date interpretations of reality and visions for the future. Social, economic, and political changes had been ongoing for decades in most parts of the late Ottoman Empire, and the intellectual answers to these challenges reverberated in emerging political and religious movements calling for restoration, reform, or revolution. Already at the end of the nineteenth century, the ‘quête de soi-même’<sup>16</sup> had been at the core of the early Arab revivalist movement (*al-nahḍa*).<sup>17</sup>

While European military, economic, and cultural influences had left their marks in Levantine societies, change was not only triggered by external factors. Egyptian and Ottoman administrative reforms during the nineteenth century, the evolving debates about Islamic reform, and changing demographic balances were among those factors that had set in motion controversies about the state of society.<sup>18</sup> The ascent of mass politics and the emergence of political parties were echoes of an improvement in education, growing urbanization, and an extension of basic infrastructure. Ideologically, such changes necessarily affected the perception of the new order and the definition of the individual’s role within it: ‘Memories of a world turned upside down’, as Elizabeth Thompson puts it in her work about the local colonial order under French rule, ‘would produce both a nostalgia for lost norms and a revolutionary spirit.’<sup>19</sup> Students, workers, and women gradually evolved into motivating forces that shifted the intellectual and political struggles and embarked on direct confrontations not only with the French authorities, but also with the established local powers.

In this context, modern European ideologies turned into controversial references for public conceptions of society, history, and politics. In the search for an appropriate civic order, European philosophy and political thought provided important – though anything but exclusive – starting points for reflections about the future that was envisaged. Crucial choices between autocratic rule and parliamentarianism, between individualism and communitarianism, capitalist, feudal, or socialist, secular, or religious organization of society were pressing issues discussed in public, among intellectual circles, and within newly emerging cultural and political organizations.

### ***Nationalism, change, and the rise of mass politics***

The rise of nationalist thought among intellectuals and political activists was paralleled by increasingly prevalent nationalist agitation in political battles; so much so, as Philip S. Khoury observed, that in retrospect ‘the history of the Arab world since, say 1880, has largely been written around the idea of nationalism’.<sup>20</sup> In addition to studies that have scrutinized the concrete battles over the political order not only in the urban and regional centres, but at the peripheries as well, the socio-economic conditions of these shifting struggles and the evolution of mass politics have received ever more attention. As in other parts of the Arab world, the rise of new social forces and subaltern movements in Lebanon and Syria were both causes and results of reconceptualizations of existing paradigms of community.<sup>21</sup> The formation of new actors in urban centres like Damascus,

Aleppo, and Beirut illustrates the changes that had begun to challenge the basic fundamentals of social, cultural and political life.<sup>22</sup> In the past, rural areas had often proved particularly vulnerable to popular unrest and resistance. While populations in these areas continued to play an important role within the balance of power, the evolution of formal parties and informal political and cultural circles in urban centres noticeably altered the geographical map of power. In addition, the cities themselves witnessed significant changes of power relations and patterns of political action. Edmund Burke, for one, draws attention to these changes, which were not only phenomenological, but reflected a much deeper shift of the existing structures of power.<sup>23</sup> With regard to urban protests in the Arab Middle East during the nineteenth century, Burke highlights the prominent role of local mosques as starting points for popular protests; traditionally, mosques were the places where crowds gathered and from where demonstrators embarked to voice their anger to the institutions of power. Already during the early decades of the twentieth century, patterns of urban contests had become more complex. Not only had the mosques lost their immediate influence over greater parts of the population; the emergence of markets and businesses as potential battlefields for political demands resounded in workers' strikes and boycotts as new forms of political action. The option of popular protest shifted more and more from the countryside to the cities and from 'the mosques to the markets'.<sup>24</sup>

In the French mandated territories, the growing urbanization and the modernization of social structures were paralleled by the emergence of a modern secular-educated youth.<sup>25</sup> Trapped between the traditional order and growing European influence in such crucial fields as education, culture, and politics, youth organizations noticeably challenged the post-Ottoman structures. Their agenda was not limited to a fight against colonialism, but raised significant demands for substantial changes of the local order. At the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s, the intensification of the economic crisis and the obvious failure of mainstream nationalist politics gave further impetus to a radicalization of this new *effendiyya*.

In this context, references of the youth organizations to their European contemporaries were not only stylistic. Since the turn of the century, public debates and intellectual reflections about the state of society had absorbed ever more information and impressions from non-Arab and non-Muslim societies.<sup>26</sup> Depicting Beirut as a meeting place between the Levant and Europe, the historian Mas'ūd Ḍāhīr characterizes the city as a centre of diverse religious and political influences. Writing about the 1930s, Mas'ūd states:

During these years, Beirut provided the stage for crucial intellectual competitions between the calls of Mediterraneanism, Phoenicianism, Pharonism, Fascism, Nazism, and Zionism. In addition, the most important international literary and cultural schools – such as Romanticism, Impressionism, Symbolism, Realism, Surrealism, Cubism and others – competed among each other. The city's cultural pulpits provided meeting-places for the elites of culture and art in the Arab homeland – in actual and continuing exchange with the great literates of the world.<sup>27</sup>

While these debates were particularly intense in Beirut, the geographically more isolated town of Damascus was not without similar influences. On an intellectual level, these influences reverberated in many of the writings that shaped nationalist discourses during the 1930s and early 1940s. While early Christian protagonists of Arab nationalist thought had intensively debated contemporary European thought, Muslim intellectuals increasingly joined in. As in the case of Shakīb Arslān, whose collection of essays entitled *Why do Muslims lag behind, while others advance?* had posed the question of the Arab-Islamic world's relations to Europe, the Tripoli-born Islamic reformer Rashīd Riḍā repeatedly discussed potential lessons to be learned from Europe.<sup>28</sup> Muḥammad Kurd 'Alī, another prominent Islamic thinker of Kurdish origin from Damascus, provided additional contributions to these debates.<sup>29</sup>

Although most of these writers were critical of contemporary European societies, their reflections about non-Muslim cultures added to ongoing debates in the Levant. While Europe figured prominently amongst these influences, events and changes in other parts of the world attracted no less interest. Lebanese and Syrian societies did not escape the crucial questions posed by the Kemalist reforms in Turkey and the transformations in Iran.<sup>30</sup>

### ***Syria and Lebanon in 1933: between crisis and resistance***

In the early 1930s, the strategic position of France and Britain in their respective mandates was increasingly challenged by outside interferences, but even more so by internal opposition and resistance. The conclusion of the Iraqi–Anglo agreement in 1930 and the admission of Iraq to the League of Nations in 1932 had a profound impact in the region. Despite its shortcomings – the treaty still entailed severe restrictions on Iraqi political independence – the agreement was widely perceived in Lebanon and Syria as a noticeable success of Iraqi anti-mandatory resistance and, in consequence, provided further motivation for similar efforts against France. In Palestine, the clashes that had confronted Muslims and Jews in 1929 had marked a significant escalation of the conflict, contributing to growing public awareness in the neighbouring countries of the successes of Zionism and its consequences for Arab nationalist ambitions.

The creation of the broader nationalist alliance of the Syrian National Bloc (*al-kutla al-waṭaniyya*) in late 1927, which was to dominate Syrian political life for the next two decades, had been a result of the continuing frustration of basic nationalist demands for unity and independence. In the light of France's suppression of the Syrian uprising of 1925–6, the National Bloc provided a unified stance of several nationalist leaders based on moderate nationalist claims and class-related economic interests.<sup>31</sup> Other nationalists had remained exiled; yet, personalities such as 'Abd al-Raḥmān Shahabandar in Cairo, Shakīb Arslān in Geneva and his brother 'Ādil Arslān in Baghdad continued to engage publicly in Syrian and Lebanese politics and remained explicit reference points for what were often radical positions within nationalist circles.



By October 1927, the first statement issued by the National Bloc highlighted its willingness to cooperate with France. Pursuing a policy ‘born out of defeat’,<sup>32</sup> the predominantly Sunni leaders represented the higher and landowning stratum of the urban centres. Being a ‘bloc’ rather than a party, the organization gained support not so much through specific programmatic goals or political demands, but via persistent paternalistic structures based on personal allegiance to the respective leaders. In times of need, such allegiances allowed for the mobilization of public opinion for concrete actions deemed important by the Bloc’s leadership. Its mouthpieces, the Damascene newspapers *al-Qabas* and *al-Ayyām*, enhanced the organization’s outreach.<sup>33</sup>

Similar structures of patron–client relations had long shaped political life in Lebanon. In addition to Arab nationalist circles that were closely linked to nationalist currents in Syria, the Maronite community provided prominent political actors. Ranging from open supporters of the French mandate to proponents of an independent Lebanese state based on Christian–Muslim cooperation, the Maronite community was engaged in major struggles for the future order. For their part, Lebanese–Arab nationalists shared many concerns of their Syrian counterparts, but were much more deeply entangled in debates over Muslim–Christian relations and prospects of the Lebanese borders.

At the turn of 1932–3, the situation was marked not only by a severe economic crisis, but by political setbacks as well. In Lebanon, in spring 1932, strong opposition to a presidential candidate who was favoured by the French High Commissioner led the French administration to suspend the constitution and to reintroduce a system of direct rule.<sup>34</sup> While some supported this move as a necessary step to fight ever-growing corruption and to prevent further sectarian struggles between Muslim and Christian communities, it hardly improved the economic situation. In Syria, the economic crisis was no less severe, and political uncertainties added to the conflicts with the mandate authorities. It was in this context that new political organizations were to emerge that would profoundly reshape the political landscape. While the Syrian–Lebanese Communist Party had been active since the mid-1920s, the creation of the clandestine Syrian Nationalist Party (*al-ḥizb al-sūrī al-qawmī*) in 1932, the League of National Action (*‘uṣbat al-‘amal al-qawmī*) in 1933, and the clandestine Arab Nationalist Party (*al-ḥizb al-qawmī al-‘arabī*) in 1935 stood for significant changes of the existing political scenery.<sup>35</sup> Challenging the political dominance of notables and traditional leaders, these organizations reflected the rise of a young, educated stratum with increasingly distinct political visions. For one, the League of National Action that was formed by representatives from Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Palestine openly advanced radical concepts of Arab national unity.<sup>36</sup> In a peculiar way, the Arab Nationalist Party (ANP) shared essential features of the League; however, its support for non-religious foundations of Arab nationalist identity and its call for a separation of religion and state nevertheless distinguished it. As such, the ANP had much profited from the specific atmosphere of the American University of Beirut (AUB). The ever more politicized and highly educated milieu of the university offered a receptive audience for the party’s programmatic vision that was best represented by Qusṭanṭīn

Zurayq – himself a young educator at the AUB who would become an outstanding intellectual authority for Arab thought and philosophy.<sup>37</sup>

In various respects, the American University of Beirut was crucial to contemporary cultural and political life. As its intellectual activities were exceptional in the region as a whole, it provided space and opportunity for the faculty and students to discuss and rally around current political issues and conflicts.<sup>38</sup> The question of Palestine, Arab unity, and the struggles against colonial rule were only some of the topics that were regularly addressed in its cultural clubs, lectures, and demonstrations. In Syria, the opening of numerous government secondary schools, which increased drastically during the 1920s and early 1930s, facilitated the formation of this new *effendiyya*.<sup>39</sup> As a trigger for the formation of a new middle class with its distinct economic, cultural, and political characteristics, the advance of educational institutions such as the Damascene *Tajhīz* secondary school paralleled the evolution of youth as a political actor.

Battles over the future order were not limited to immediate action vis-à-vis the authorities and interventions in the form of strikes, demonstrations, and public protests; these battles equally involved the shaping of public discourses and the forming of cultural, religious, and political concepts. Reflecting the emergence of mass politics, the urban public had gained importance as a battlefield for political authority and cultural legitimacy. The considerable number of daily newspapers and magazines that were published not only in major cities such as Damascus, Beirut, and Aleppo, but in numerous other smaller provincial towns as well, reflected mounting awareness of crucial challenges during these years.<sup>40</sup> Since the establishment of the short-lived Arab government in Damascus in December 1918, a plethora of newspapers had been founded, echoing new political freedoms that had been forcefully suppressed in the late decades of Ottoman rule.<sup>41</sup> While in Beirut alone 180 periodicals appeared in the years between 1921 and 1936, over 50 new titles had become available in Damascus.<sup>42</sup> These papers not only provided information about local, regional, and international developments; in addition, they offered daily comments and analyses about cultural and philosophical questions, often written by renowned activists and thinkers. Between 1918 and 1939, twenty-two publications in Beirut alone were dedicated to culture, history, and literature. While a similar number of publications covered religious issues, ten other journals dealt with educational topics.<sup>43</sup> Notwithstanding the comparatively smaller number of publications that were available in Damascus, here again the press played an important role in reflecting and forming public opinion. In fact, despite serious obstacles represented by a lack of funding and administrative censorship, the press to a large extent echoed ongoing debates and conflicts. Similarly to satirical journals like *al-Dabbūr* and *al-Muḍḥik al-Mubkī*, magazines like *al-Ma'rif*, *al-Duhūr*, *ʿIrfān*, and *al-Ḥadīth* contributed outstanding articles challenging common knowledge and opinion about politics, art, economy, and religion.

To a considerable extent, the diversity of Syrian and Lebanese societies was reflected in the press. Leading newspapers like *al-Qabas*, *al-Ayyām*, *Alif Bāʾ*, *al-Nahār*, and *al-Nidāʾ* were nationalist voices close to specific parties and Arab

nationalist trends; and yet, they often remained open to conflicting positions and programmatic changes. Other newspapers such as *al-Ṣiḥāfī al-Tā'ih* and the French-language daily newspapers *La Syrie*, *L'Orient* and *Le Jour* added no less controversially to the formation and mirroring of a public audience. As the political landscape was in constant flux – organizationally and ideologically shifting along with essential questions related to the social and political order – so, too, these newspapers were not only political mouthpieces, but ‘stages’ for public reflection and conflict, as it were, enacting the spirit of the time: ‘l’esprit d’une époque inquiète et féconde’.<sup>44</sup>

## 2 Struggles for a new order

### The rise of the Nazi regime and the Levantine mandates (1933–1936)

Developments in Germany in the years immediately preceding the ascent of Nazism were closely followed in the Lebanese and Syrian public. Retrospective memories of the early 1930s reveal the level of attention that political elites, but also the broader public, paid to the events in Europe in general, and in Germany in particular.<sup>1</sup> The mounting conflicts between the European states were curiously eyed for their consequences on the balance of power in the Middle East. In addition, the emergence of new European political movements and intellectual trends stimulated reflections about their potential messages for the populations living under foreign rule. Past relations between Germany and the former Ottoman Empire and the outcome of the First World War gave Germany particular weight in these considerations: the ‘chains of Versailles’ – as the treaty of Versailles became known in Germany – seemed reminiscent of the unfulfilled British promises made during the war about Arab independence. Frequent reports about the political situation in Germany, the fate of the late German Emperor Wilhelm II, and the struggles between Germany and its neighbours over a revision of post-war borders kept the public informed about a European power that was otherwise deprived of any direct political influence in the region. Throughout these years, memories of Bismarck and the past German Empire continued to be recounted in stories, jokes, and comments that endured long after the National Socialist regime had taken its place.

The ‘German revolution’ of January 1933 ended the internal struggles over the future path of German society. The final years of the Weimar Republic and its increasingly violent conflicts between communists, social democrats and the growing Nazi movement echoed the mounting tensions between ever more incompatible political options. For the Arab Middle East, Nazism in the early 1930s was neither a real threat nor an immediate ally; yet, it soon turned into a controversial intellectual stimulus. Far from being limited to specific aspects of National Socialist politics and thought, these reflections about Nazi Germany’s ideological vision progressively broadened and began to dwell upon various questions raised by the success of Hitler’s regime.

Reflecting the broad range of public references made to the developments in Germany in the press, an analysis of major newspapers allows for an evaluation of the depth of available knowledge on the one hand and the diversity of

related assessments on the other. The coverage of the transfer of power in Germany and of the immediate measures taken by the new regime furthered awareness for the respective ideological concepts and their concrete translation into political action. Although still preliminary and often contradictory, such evolving public knowledge served as a relevant background for the positioning of local political circles vis-à-vis the new regime: Germany – represented by the Consulate General in Beirut – was not only one interlocutor amongst others, but stood more and more for a specific political regime with aspirations for no less specific visions.

### **Nazism in the local press: crisis, challenge, and the longing for a ‘New Dawn’**

Information about the ascent of authoritarian movements as political forces in Europe came to the Levant via a variety of channels. Italian propaganda and the opening of Italian schools, hospitals and cultural centres as bases for pro-fascist activities had created an early attentiveness for this new current of thought. The formation of an Italian Fascist centre in Beirut in 1923 and its contacts with Muslim scouts deepened the awareness for the Fascist movement that claimed to revolutionize the prevailing order.<sup>2</sup> Italian imperial ambitions in the Mediterranean and the rapprochement between Mussolini and the Vatican in the late 1920s increasingly turned Fascism into a relevant topic in local political debates.

The rise of authoritarianism and militarism in Germany during the 1920s did not pass unnoticed either. In 1925, the election of Field Marshal Hindenburg as successor to the social democrat Friedrich Ebert as President of the Weimar Republic was described in the early communist newspaper *al-Insāniyya* as an indicator of the increasing influence of militarist and radical nationalist currents.<sup>3</sup> Revisionist tendencies within the German political spectrum, however, were not only perceived as a threat to peace; instead, in some circles, fascination was voiced for a power that was struggling to overcome the impacts of a post-war regional order laid down at Versailles.

### ***Societies in change and the legitimacy of rule***

The image of German society as at a crucial crossroads echoed a persistent mood in Levantine societies themselves. Speaking at a graduation ceremony at the American Girls’ College in Beirut in June 1933, Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Nuṣūlī, a prominent leader of the Muslim Scout organization, articulated this feeling and hinted at the perceived challenges of ongoing social transformations:

We live in an age of machines, speed, of competition, in an age of noise. An age like this requires extraordinary courage and graceful patience, for these machines, speed, competitions, and noise are borderless; everyday we, the Orientals, are confronted with [new] ideas, thoughts, conditions and institutions.<sup>4</sup>

Despite these challenges and the problems of adaptation to innovations and new ideas, Nuṣūlī considered the increasing interaction between the ‘Orient’ and Europe a necessity of the time:

The East is not East, and the West is not West any more. There is only one world that should be united for the sake of its prosperity and the easing of its suffering, and we, for our part as human beings, shall not differentiate between one colour and another, between one religion and another, between one nation and another; that spiritual happiness will be for all and a new dawn will break for the world, a dawn of cooperation and understanding.<sup>5</sup>

As such, this ‘new dawn’ that is referred to here emphatically stood for the desire to overcome the persisting order; it also marked the vagueness of the alternative vision.

That said, references to Germany were not limited to major political events or international tensions. Debates among German intellectuals about the future of society and potential solutions for the economic and political crisis frequently resonated in various articles and reports. In a peculiar mixture of information about daily affairs, life-style, culture, and politics, the readers were confronted with an image of German society in a state of cultural disorientation and political crisis. For one, the Lebanese journal *al-Maʿriḍ* articulated these perceptions. The intellectual audience and the relatively broad range of opinions expressed in this journal allow the capture of the variety of perspectives on ongoing developments in Germany. Already in 1932, articles about literature, art, and politics had shed light on urgent cultural and political questions debated in Germany of the time. Quoting from an interview with the former German Emperor Wilhelm II, *al-Maʿriḍ* particularly noted the emperor’s statement in support of Hitler and his enmity towards Jews, but also his longing for ‘a popular revolution that we need to purify our modern morals and to root out the worms of corruption that are decaying the bones of the entire nation.’<sup>6</sup> Together with essays on German literature and articles about the programme of the NSDAP, the readers were exposed to a variety of information about contemporary German society. National Socialist ideology, here, was important, though hardly the central focus. In fact, Nazism was not necessarily a distinct topic in its own right. More often than not, references to Hitler and the rising Nazi movement appeared in passing or were linked to information about daily life, placing Nazism in the social and political context of the time.

In this respect, Hitler’s appointment as Reich Chancellor on 30 January 1933 did not come as a surprise. The immediate importance of his takeover was nonetheless obvious in various reactions prompted by Hitler’s rise to power. Only weeks after Hitler’s nomination, Shakīb Arslān, the head of the Syrian–Palestinian delegation to the League of Nations in Geneva and arguably the most influential Arab representative in Europe, highlighted the relevance of Hitler’s ascent in the context of the European crisis. In one of his frequent letters that were published by various newspapers in the Arab world, Arslān declared:

The transfer of the German government into the hands of Hitler and Germany's demand to adjust the treaties that were signed as a result of the general war is among the most important events related to general European politics that were paralleled by nothing significant since the end of the [World] War.<sup>7</sup>

Arslān's early interest in Nazism as a challenge to the future of Europe was shared by many observers. Hitler's appointment and the immediate steps taken to enforce his unlimited rule brought to an end the fragile parliamentary regime of the Weimar Republic. The politics of *Gleichschaltung*, of bringing into line, and the brutal suppression of dissident voices both inside and outside the Nazi movement placed the emerging political order in line with other authoritarian regimes that had been established in Europe following the First World War. These developments were of imminent relevance for the political classes in the French mandates of Lebanon and Syria. Here, the question of democracy was closely linked to the perspective of national independence from French rule. The concept of people's rule was not limited to mechanisms of internal decision-making processes and to the balancing of social and political interests; under the authority of the French High Commissioner, democracy stood as much for independence from foreign control and intervention. Hence, the call for political representation was not only a demand raised against local elites and hierarchies, but against French domination as well.

The destruction of parliamentary structures in Germany was perceived as a further expression of the polarization of European political regimes. The formal banning of parties, the dissolution of trade unions, and the brutal persecutions of political opponents in Germany illustrated the seriousness of this trend. These events, however, not only characterized the National Socialist regime and its ideological foundations: as highly loaded symbols for the repressions and persecutions, they had turned into references which were used in public discourses to discredit supposedly similar events in the Syrian and Lebanese context.<sup>8</sup> In the light of the suspension of the Lebanese constitution, decided upon by the French High Commissioner Henri Ponsot in 1932, and the installation of Charles Dabbas as President, the satirical Damascene journal *al-Muḏḥik al-Mubkī* drew a telling parallel to Germany: 'There is news from Germany according to which Hitler's government has suspended the application of the German constitution. Two cancelled constitutions do thus exist in this world: the German and the Lebanese!'<sup>9</sup> *Al-Dabbūr*, another satirical journal from Beirut, offered a similar interpretation, claiming sarcastically that the suspensions of the constitutions were justified 'for the sake of reform'.<sup>10</sup>

These articles explicitly touched upon the legitimacy of the political order. In the context of recurring debates about a possible reintroduction of the monarchy in Syria, the question of individual rule had long been a major dispute within nationalist circles. While the National Bloc had adopted a pro-republican stand, other circles openly supported the idea of a monarchy. Yet, these respective positions did not determine a specific position regarding Hitler's rule as an authoritarian *Führer*. In fact, support for republican rule did not necessarily imply parliamentary convictions; often, parliamentarianism was simply considered as the most



effective tool to voice demands for independence and national unity.<sup>11</sup> Even newspapers that were otherwise supportive of republican rule did not abstain from openly voicing fascination for the popularity and effectiveness of Hitler's regime. In this regard, the coverage of the *Röhm*-affair in June–July 1934, in which major critics from within the Nazi movement were executed, was particularly striking. Referring to the tensions within the National Socialist movement itself, in one of his articles for the Damascene daily *al-Qabas*, the nationalist activist and member of the National Bloc Munīr al-ʿAjlānī expressed respect for Hitler's determination and his resolute suppression of his critics.<sup>12</sup> ʿAjlānī further justified this stance with a vehement critique of Kurt von Schleicher, last Reich Chancellor of the Weimar Republic, who was amongst those executed in this wave of internal repression. ʿAjlānī depicted Schleicher as 'a man without a programme, with no people behind and supporting him. He was a man of government, but not a man of the nation.'<sup>13</sup> Hitler, in contrast, enjoyed the full support of the Germans, who 'do not doubt, not for a single moment, the loyalty of the *Führer*. Therefore they are supporting Hitler; they applaud him and want him to continue to finish off the rest of the traitors.'<sup>14</sup>

The image of a legitimate and principled *Führer* acting according to the will of his people was reinforced following the confirmation of Hitler in the referendum held in August 1934. Given the broad public support, *al-Qabas* again portrayed Hitler as 'the *zaʿīm* who has promised himself to lead the German people by his hands through the darkness of these tyrannical international politics into the safe harbour where Germany will feel free, powerful and sovereign.'<sup>15</sup> Hitler's rule appeared legitimate, that is, judging by his popularity and the effectiveness of the repressive paramilitary organization of his regime.

Such views did not remain unchallenged. For one, Mīshāl Zakkūr, the editor of *al-Maʿriq*, offered some of the most outspoken criticism of authoritarian rule.<sup>16</sup> For Zakkūr, it was not only the deceptive claim to be 'socialist', but also the distraction of the people through warfare and persecutions of others that symbolized the threat posed by the authoritarian regimes:

When Hitler led the Nazi movement to power and took, with the hand of a dictator, possession of the resources of the German people – depriving the people of their freedom and their constitution in the name of a defence of their interests – he found, like all other tyrants, battlefields to distract the people [from his deeds]. ... And when the people recovered from their drunkenness and saw the suffocating crisis around them, Hitler again channelled away [the attention of] the people from this crisis and pushed them against the 'Stahlhelm'-party, then against the Jews who were left, and finally he pushed them against the Catholics. All these were weak victims of these battles that were led to distract the public from a revolt against the rule of tyranny in Germany.<sup>17</sup>

For Zakkūr, such distraction of the people from their real interests had led to the wars of the recent past, and now again risked igniting a global confrontation.

### ***The nation and racial theories***

Of equal importance in the early coverage of Nazism and its rise to power were questions addressing the ideological conception of the German *Volk*, the ‘Aryan race’, and its hostility towards the Jews. The Lebanese and Syrian public noted these concepts as formative aspects of the National Socialist movement. Under the French mandate, and previously under late Ottoman rule, conflicts about definitions of community and delimitations of its boundaries had been central to the political controversies among intellectuals and politicians as well as between the local public and the respective authorities. Addressing issues related to identity and questions of ethnic and religious minorities, the politics of Nazism touched the core of an ongoing formation process of communal loyalties in the Levant.

The National Socialist call for a revival of the German *Volk* was not limited to political reforms, but included a complex vision aimed at a resurrection of the decayed German nation. Within the context of National Socialist racial theories, the intended measures combined the development of historical narratives with legal reforms and concrete biological interventions into the reproduction of the ‘*Volkskörper*’, the biological body of the nation. The extensive control over all aspects of individual and social life had been identified, by the Lebanese and Syrian public, as a basic characteristic of National Socialist ideology. In fact, the Nazi party was seen, as one author put it, as being concerned ‘with all elements of social life and with all innate powers of all elements of the people to renew Germany’s power and to elevate her to the highest ideal among the nations’.<sup>18</sup> Even before the Nazi movement’s ultimate rise to power, the centrality of this idea of communal engineering had aroused attention. Referring to Hitler’s plans to categorize German women according to their ‘racial constitution’ and to regulate their reproduction, the journal *al-Ma’rif* had in May 1932 already reported details about the future plans of ‘cleansing the Germanic offspring’.<sup>19</sup>

As they had done in Europe and the USA, scientific theories about the genetic constitution and the evolution of life triggered controversial debates in the Arab–Islamic world as well. Touching on central religious and moral concepts, Darwinism and other scientific discoveries continued to awaken broad public interest. The presentation of a law regulating the sterilization of so-called ‘unworthy life’ in Germany attracted attention to this issue. While in some cases such measures were considered legitimate, the connection of eugenics with the very idea of a biological resurrection of the nation met with strong opposition.<sup>20</sup>

Yet, National Socialist rhetoric against supposed foreign influences threatening the interests of the German nation appeared far less suspect. In the local context, perceptions of Armenian and Assyrian minorities as ‘foreign elements’ that were undermining national independence reflected the conviction of relevant parts of Arab nationalist circles that a defence of the nation was closely tied to the preservation of its quasi-natural community. In this view, the fight for a revival of the Arab nation was linked to the safeguarding of its ethnocultural composition. Having fled the anti-Armenian massacres of the First World War and the slaughters of Assyrians in Iraq in 1933, Armenian and Assyrian minorities were often

perceived as intruders under French protection threatening the essence of the Arab nation.<sup>21</sup>

German irredentist nationalism, which longed to unify the entire German *Volk* into one single state entity, had long since attracted fascination. The ethnocultural concept of a German community and the implied idea of an unlimited individual loyalty towards the higher interests of the people resounded in expressions of contemporary Arab nationalist thought. The realization of German unity in 1871 thus frequently served as an illustration for local ideological and political visions.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, the racial hierarchy and the ambivalent position of ‘Arabs’ or ‘Orientals’ in National Socialist ideology posed an obstacle to outright affirmations of the vision identified with the nationalist ‘German revolution’.

This ambiguity with regard to National Socialist visions became most visible in local approaches to Hitler’s programmatic text *Mein Kampf*. In January 1934, *al-Nidā’* – a newspaper of explicit Arab nationalist orientation – featured an Arab translation of the book in daily serializations, which continued to be published throughout the following four months. As one of the first Arab translations of *Mein Kampf*, these successive extracts from the book gave authentic insight into Hitler’s thoughts and politics.<sup>23</sup> Its corpus was briefly introduced by its Arab translator Kāmil Murūwa; according to him, the book revealed

the secret of the enormous power which is exercised by Hitler over millions of educated persons. It reveals how he was able to ascend from the lower military ranks during the war to become the dictator of Germany. It uncovers how he was transformed from a friend of the Jews to their fiercest enemy.<sup>24</sup>

Hitler’s political aim, Murūwa continued, was the creation of ‘a new and pure Germany’, with Nazism saving the German people

from the psychological pains [of the war], from the snares of intruders, from the heritage of war and its painful memories, [saving the people] from the disease of communism, from the ‘moderate’ leadership that is advocating a politics of ‘good understanding’ with the Allies. It shall save the people from the dominance of the children of Zion, from the servitude to foreign obligations, from the spirit of submission and humiliation ... The aim of Nazism is to] build from the rumble of the collapsed democratic republic an iron authority based on the people, acting from within the people for the people. ... A power that will deeply affect Europe: Europe will look at her with fear and fright, with concern and anxiety!<sup>25</sup>

Barely concealing his fascination for Hitler and his political programme, Murūwa’s introduction included direct allusions to the local political context under French rule. His critique of the ‘spirit of submission’ and a ‘politics of good understanding’ with outside powers echoed a growing public opposition to the reluctant politics of the leading nationalist actors towards the French authorities. Voicing his hope that the reader might choose ‘the best and the most suitable’<sup>26</sup> from the

premises expressed in *Mein Kampf*, Murūwa's comments drew on the height of popular anger and the developing radical nationalist movement.

*Mein Kampf*, however, was hardly a loose collection of thoughts and ideas from which the reader could easily choose some while rejecting others. The formative racial ideology necessarily linked the perception of Germany to its claim of racial superiority, and to its implied assumptions about the supposed 'racial other'. Positive stances towards National Socialist concepts thus required treading a tightrope between affirmations of racial differentiations and the derogatory role attributed in these theories to Arabs. In this regard, the translation of *Mein Kampf* and its benevolent introduction to its readers inevitably raised concerns. Obviously reacting to criticism from readers, Kāzīm al-Şulḥ, the editor of *al-Nidā'*, commented on the publication and clarified the position of his paper. While refuting the racial concept implied in the book, Şulḥ insisted on a supposed message that could be derived from Hitler's thoughts. '*Mein Kampf*', he argued, 'is the plan of a man and a nation that resembles the life of our youth and our nation at their beginnings.'<sup>27</sup>

This position echoed Hitler's perspective on the state of post-war German society. In the light of the variety of contemporary nationalist ideologies, Şulḥ's explicit reference to German nationalism in its contemporary form was neither random, nor was it the only possible option.

### ***The question of minorities and the persecution of Jews***

Independence from foreign rule, the definition of borders and the relations with religious and ethnic minorities were at the core of ongoing disputes over an appropriate nationalist orientation. To a large extent, the diverse ideological elaborations of the nation that were circulating in the local public were reminiscent of those discussed in Europe. Various territorial, historical, cultural, but also biological considerations offered quasi-scientific proofs for the suggested delimitations of community. In the light of the territorial fragmentation of populations, historical experiences of nation-building in Europe were of direct interest.<sup>28</sup> The question of the religious foundations of national identity was of particular importance in the local context. The impact of the respective status as a religious or ethnic community for the definition of communal bonds was markedly visible in the disputes amongst Lebanese and Syrian nationalists. Emphasizing the Christian particularities of Lebanon, Christian proponents of a distinct Lebanese nation referred to religion as a major argument to justify their opposition to Arab nationalist territorial ambitions. In contrast, Arab nationalist voices often tended to advance explicit non-sectarian arguments to justify their vision: 'Religion is for God, the nation is for all!' was the motto that was forwarded by these circles, not least as a challenge to claims raised by representatives of the various religious and ethnic minorities.<sup>29</sup>

The question of minorities within the state and the nation, which had occupied the local public itself, marked perceptions of Europe and European politics as well. Discrimination of Muslims in Europe, for instance, was a major concern at the European Islamic conference in Geneva in 1935.<sup>30</sup> In contrast, European

protection and support of the minorities in the Middle East had long since been criticized as an instrument and pretext for colonial interventions; the ‘creation’ of minorities by European powers was commonly considered as aiming at a division of local populations according to these powers’ immediate political or economic interests.<sup>31</sup> In consequence, political and religious claims of the Armenian and Assyrian populations appeared suspicious, as they were seen as nothing but ‘a cause cooked in the kitchen of imperialism, for the sake of imperialism.’<sup>32</sup> Related to this perception, then, was the rejection of humanitarian arguments that were forwarded to legitimize the European stance towards refugees. Calls for the granting of Lebanese and Syrian citizenship to German–Jewish refugees, for instance, were considered as contradicting the strict regulations that were governing citizenship laws imposed on the Arab population itself. In the light of the politics pursued by the mandate powers towards their local subjects, humanism seemed, at best, a cynical argument.<sup>33</sup>

International reactions to Germany’s politics against Jews differed from past experiences with European policies in the Middle East. While some regarded the debates in the League of Nations and the criticism levelled against Germany for its anti-Jewish policies as a result of ‘the pressure by Jews’, others openly wondered about the lack of concern and the missing calls for military action.<sup>34</sup> Since the countries in the Middle East had on various occasions faced foreign interventions in the name of the protection of ethnic and religious minorities, international reactions to Nazism were strikingly half-hearted.<sup>35</sup>

The centrality of the hostility towards Jews in Nazi ideology had been noticed even before the National Socialist rise to power. Already at the beginning of the 1930s, newspapers had covered expressions of anti-Jewish enmity in Germany as a basic tenet of the new political movement.<sup>36</sup> The deprivation of Jews of civil rights was described here as a key aspect of Hitler’s political programme. Accordingly, reports of Hitler’s takeover of power placed a particular emphasis on the immediate measures taken by the NSDAP to implement the anti-Semitic vision. Articles about the introduction of discriminatory laws and the boycott movement against Jewish businesses offered detailed information about the deteriorating situation.<sup>37</sup>

In fact, anti-Jewish resentments were not entirely unknown to Levantine societies. The Jewish communities of Lebanon and Syria counted among the smaller religious minorities that were concentrated in the urban centres of Beirut, Damascus, and Aleppo.<sup>38</sup> In Lebanon, confessional regulations established by the Lebanese constitution of 1926 defined their legal status, granting guarantees that were similar to other religious groups. The acknowledgement of the Jewish community ‘as one minority among many, rather than [as] second-class citizens or even [as] the enemy within’,<sup>39</sup> considerably strengthened its position vis-à-vis the state and other communities. Throughout the mandate period, Jews were part of the political struggles over the balancing of communal interests and the formulation of a policy towards the French authorities. While the majority of Lebanese Jews remained critical of the Zionist project, leading Maronite personalities occasionally defended the formation of a Jewish state in Palestine as an important means

to counter Muslim dominance in the region.<sup>40</sup> In Syria, the situation differed in terms of several aspects. The dominant currents of pan-Arab nationalism focused on ethnocultural definitions of the collective, substituting references to distinct religious communities by claims of shared Arab cultural and historical characteristics. Yet, despite its formal secularism, for many, Arab nationalism in the Syrian context with its overwhelmingly Sunni majority continued to imply a 'defence of Islam against foreign aggression'.<sup>41</sup> The perception of Jews and their possible political and religious claims was thus necessarily tied to these conceptualizations of national identity and the identification of outside threats.

Religious resentments added to the ambivalence of the image of the Jews.<sup>42</sup> Classical Christian anti-Judaism and the ambiguous depictions of Jews in Islamic traditions echoed in reactions to the anti-Semitic measures implemented in Germany. In the light of growing tensions with Zionism and by now the frequent campaigns against Jewish immigration to the region, perceptions of National Socialist anti-Semitism were closely related to the prevalent images of the Jews. Yet, even critical coverage of the persecutions in Germany did not necessarily obstruct the deliberate publication of anti-Jewish prejudices. Anti-Jewish jokes featured in various newspapers, perhaps most prominently in the satirical magazines *al-Dabbūr* and *al-Muḍḥik al-Mubkī*, illustrating the existence of commonly known stereotypes and – more often than not – open resentments.<sup>43</sup> Claims of conspiracies of the Jews, for instance, were raised, even though similar charges were identified as central patterns of National Socialist rhetoric.<sup>44</sup>

Since March 1933, articles about Jews fleeing Germany to neighbouring countries had drawn attention to the international dimension of the plight of the German Jews. In early April, rising concerns within the Jewish community of Syria and Lebanon were reported, and the consultations of the League of Nations and the debates about possible sanctions against Germany further added to awareness of the events in Germany. By summer 1933, the growing number of exiled Jews looking for refuge had turned into a problem directly involving daily politics in Lebanon and Syria. Rumours about German-Jewish women and children desperately wandering from street to street in Syrian cities and searching for work and shelter, as well as reports about German Jews illegally crossing the Lebanese border were widespread in the local newspapers.<sup>45</sup>

The Jewish communities in Lebanon and Syria anxiously followed these developments. On 30 March 1933, a meeting of Jewish organizations in Beirut formulated a joint resolution expressing concern about the latest news from Germany.<sup>46</sup> The German Consul General tried to dispel these concerns through an open letter to the Grand Rabbi of Beirut that was meant to reassure the local Jewish communities of Germany's good intentions. Yet, the flow of information about continuing persecutions obviously proved the consul's claims to be inaccurate.<sup>47</sup> By late July 1933, driven by persisting press reports about persecutions in Germany, notables of the Jewish community in Beirut initiated the creation of a local branch of the *Ligue internationale contre l'antisémitisme*.<sup>48</sup>

The prospect of a possible German-Jewish immigration – similar to a potential settlement of Assyrian refugees from Iraq – polarized the public.<sup>49</sup> Already

shortly after Hitler's rise to power, advocates of Jewish immigration had started to highlight its potential economic benefits.<sup>50</sup> Economic reasoning, however, was not the only approach towards a growing number of German immigrants.<sup>51</sup> While the swift campaign against a possible immigration of German Jewish doctors and pharmacists during summer 1933 did focus on economic concerns, even in this context the debates echoed misgivings with regard to the future of the national community.<sup>52</sup> The Lebanese newspaper *al-Nahār*, for instance, which in the past had emphasized the supposedly destructive impact of Jews in Germany, highlighted this argument in commentaries contributed by its editor Jibrān Tuwaynī. According to Tuwaynī, the immigration of Jews to Syria and Lebanon risked creating a community apart, unable and unwilling to integrate into their new social surroundings. Referring to the European experience, Tuwaynī argued that Jews continued to form strange constituencies among the local European populations, thus posing a threat to national loyalty.<sup>53</sup>

This perception of Jews as a hostile element threatening the community was no exception. Summarizing several letters to the editor, a columnist of *al-Ṣiḥāfī al-Tā'ih* offered an insight into the arguments forwarded by its readers against Jewish immigration. Here, resentments were not directed against Zionists, but against both local and immigrant Jews in general:

This one reader said [in his letter]: The Jews are a people of evil-doers. They will eat up everything, and they will control the markets. That one said: The Jews are an intriguing group that works in hiding to kill nationalism and the principle of freedom. The third one said: If the Jews occupy our country, they will inflict distress and bring disasters over it. The fourth said: The Jews are communists and are arriving with the principles of Lenin. They will impose Bolshevism on us, and our nation [*qawmiyya*] and our goods will become their property. They will bring corruption over our country. And the fifth states that the presence of the Jews in Lebanon will be the reason for moral corruption.<sup>54</sup>

Such perceptions of Jews pre-established public assessments of the anti-Semitic persecutions in Germany. National Socialist policies against Jews were thus interpreted within the existing perception schemes of inter-religious and inter-ethnic conflicts in the local context.

### ***Reviving the nation: youth, women, and the state of morality***

Nationalist discourses were closely tied to the longing for a national revival. The popularity of youth movements in various European countries stimulated debates about the possible role of the youth within society. With their uniform outfit and their strict organization, the emerging formations represented the successful mobilization of the youth for nationalist goals. Being a driving force for the re-emergence of society from a state of decay and submission, nationalists in Lebanon and Syria – as in Iraq, Egypt, and Palestine – saw the mass organization

of the youth as a cornerstone for the development of the nation and for stepping up the nationalist struggle against its enemies from within and from the outside.<sup>55</sup>

Fascination for youth organizations in Europe had been fostered by frequent reports in the local press. With their modern and often paramilitary appearance in style and structure, the Hitler Youth and other fascist organizations were widely seen as providing solutions for the pending problems of society. According to *al-Nidā*, ‘fascist formations’ were the basis for the revival of Germany’s strength. Drawing on a recent visit to Germany, one author identified the organization and the physical drill of the German youth as being ‘the secret of the resurgence of this nation.’<sup>56</sup> Physical education of the youth was thus the reason for Germany’s successes – and for the failing of others. While Germany ‘wants to live and to occupy a place under the sun’, a report in *al-Qabas* argued, the Lebanese nation, for one, is at a standstill.<sup>57</sup>

The idealization of strength and power that was characteristic not only for National Socialist youth organizations, but for authoritarian organizations in other countries as well, was perceived as a prerequisite for the national struggle. Consequently, *al-Qabas* explicitly called on young people to unify their ranks in an attempt to overcome the current state of weakness:

Arab Youth! Let your eternal slogan be: We shall be strong! ... We are not wrong if we say that the current age is the age of power. Who wants to survive and to triumph in life – as an individual or as a nation – has to be strong. Strong in every aspect of intellectual, cultural and material life.<sup>58</sup>

Local representatives of the European powers closely followed such fascination. While German activities in the region were restrained,<sup>59</sup> Italy had launched considerable efforts to spread its influence through indoctrination of the local youth. These efforts included the invitation to hundreds of youngsters to participate in month-long trips to Italy and to join Fascist summer camps. Most participants were members of Italian schools or otherwise entertained contacts with Italian institutions. Yet, news of these trips spread to a much broader public.<sup>60</sup> Crowds of people were reportedly attracted to listen to Arab broadcasts on Italian Radio Bari in which local youngsters spoke about their visits to Italy and praised the Italian regime.<sup>61</sup>

Others vehemently questioned these visits and strongly opposed any sympathy for the Fascist power. Despite all Italian propaganda efforts, Italian repressions in Libya were still part of public memory.<sup>62</sup> For many, Italian youth exchanges were nothing but scarcely concealed strategies by a European power to realize its imperialist goals.<sup>63</sup>

Local perceptions of European youth organizations hence reflected various aspects of the ambivalent relations to the European powers themselves. As symbols of national strength and modernization, they strongly appealed to the local public as vehicles for social transformation and national revival. As propaganda instruments for imperial ambitions, however, references to these formations were not entirely beyond doubt.



A similar ambivalence is striking with regard to the role attributed to women in nationalist struggles. In this context, the situation of women in European societies was frequently a topic that was covered in local newspapers and magazines, with National Socialist Germany being no exception.<sup>64</sup> Questions about wearing the veil, women's suffrage, and the status of women in the public sphere had increasingly gained attention since the final years of the Ottoman Empire. With the politicization of local women's organizations, these issues had explicitly been placed in the context of a struggle for a resurrection of the nation – politically, but also culturally. The participation of women in public affairs and an extension of their rights were perceived as crucial contributions to liberation from foreign rule and as a necessity for preserving the characteristics of the Arab nation. Far from being of importance for women alone, the ongoing transformations of social, political, and legal conditions of women's life and changing relations between men and women were perceived as a crucial national question.

The success of Nazism stimulated these reflections about the appropriate balancing of gender relations in society. As with Italian Fascism, Kemalism and Bolshevism, the importance attached to these relations in National Socialist declarations echoed in the local press coverage. Even before Hitler's rise to power, his views about the position of women in society had attracted attention. In May 1932, for instance, the journal *al-Ma'riq* had highlighted the support for Hitler among the female electorate in Germany.<sup>65</sup> This interest in living conditions for women mirrored a similar concern for the situation in the territories under French mandate. Strikingly, an article by a French journalist about the different role models of women in Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia appeared in Arabic translation in several local newspapers.<sup>66</sup>

The declared goal of such overviews was to make the variety of social concepts visible, often focusing on the difference between dictatorial and democratic regimes. Yet, the stance of Nazism towards women appeared to be of particular interest for the readers. In addition to general reports about basic doctrines regarding women and their political implementation, Hitler's personal relations with women were the starting point for some of the more dubious articles featuring contemporary Germany and its social and political life.<sup>67</sup> The political support, and equally the personal sympathies that women showed, for Hitler often triggered reports and comments. At the core of these articles lay the apparent contradiction between women's limited role in daily life and their fascination for Hitler's person.<sup>68</sup> Reports about Hitler's relations with women – the film-maker Leni Riefenstahl and the actress Marlene Dietrich were among those mentioned – challenged a commonly held view according to which Hitler had refrained from any romantic attachment.<sup>69</sup>

While these articles drew considerably on a peculiar mixture of love affair, sex, crime, and politics – a melange that was often expressed in fabricated photos that showed Hitler often among scantily dressed women – they were not limited to early expressions of tabloid journalism. Narratives of personal encounters with German women similarly echoed a peculiar combination of news report, anecdotes, and romance, often implying sexual liberalism as a supposed trait of

German society. While an article written by the Lebanese poet Mīshāl Ṭrād about a brief encounter with a German-Jewish poetess made no secret of the mutual attraction, others were subtler in their allusions to an assumed permissiveness of modern German women.<sup>70</sup>

These articles touched on the state of male–female relations, and more generally, the state of morality and culture in Germany.<sup>71</sup> The safeguarding of the family and of morality was a major concern for nationalist movements. In this regard, Western societies and their social order not only provided examples to follow; they were as much illustrations of failures and degeneration that were to be prevented. Referring to the ambivalences of European modernization, Kāẓim al-Ṣulḥ explicitly made this claim. Drawing attention to the role of the women for the revival of the nation, he argued:

While we are at the outset of a nationalist life, which we are trying to build on the basis of modern science and modern civilization, we should take care not to commit the mistakes of the civilized nations, only to regret them later and to retract. We should instead directly take up only those things that were adopted by young nations that arose in recent times, such as Czechoslovakia, Germany, and Italy. We should grant the women – the educated as well as the uneducated ones – their particular roles that were given to them by nature. This would be of no harm for them, as both man's leisure and income will be for her and for him – even more so, if man and women are two partners forming together a well-advanced national family. This is what the modern patriotic nationalists [*al-qawmiyyūn al-waṭaniyyūn*] are calling for, in this country as elsewhere.<sup>72</sup>

### ***'War, War!' – the crisis of the international order***

Hitler's rise to power was mirrored in the immediate changes of Germany's policies towards its European neighbours, the League of Nations, and to the post-war international order. The insistence on the revision of the Versailles treaty was not only based on the country's supposed political and economic needs; it was an expression of an expansionist vision for Germany's future role in Europe and the world at large. German territorial ambitions within the Arab Middle East had remained vague during these early years of National Socialist rule. Yet, in a peculiar way the territorial disputes provoked by Germany's claims towards its European neighbours resembled the existing or developing border conflicts in the regions under French and British rule.

Calling for a revision of borders, the different elements within Lebanese and Syrian nationalist circles keenly followed the developments in central Europe, carefully considering the arguments brought forward in the emerging territorial conflicts. In fact, the revision of the international order laid down during the peace conference in Versailles was a major demand raised by both the Nazi regime and Arab nationalist actors.

By early 1933, widespread concern and a public atmosphere of crisis characterized the situation in the territories under French rule. This atmosphere was not only due to political conflicts with the French authorities and growing economic

shortcomings but was also aggravated by international tensions that recalled the memories of the destruction and suffering caused by the First World War. Accordingly, the festivities on 11 November 1933, marking the 15th anniversary of the end of the war, only encountered sporadic interest among the population.<sup>73</sup> *Al-Qabas* highlighted the disquiet about a possible future conflict: ‘War, War! War is coming back in its most revolting form. If in the past, war had let some life survive, it will be all-crushing this time, leaving nothing behind among men, animals, and buildings.’<sup>74</sup>

In these perceptions, the threats of war were not exclusively linked to the rise of Nazism as a new political player. Nazism, however, was seen as major factor destabilizing the post-war order with its aggressive territorial and political demands. In October 1933, Germany’s decision to withdraw from the League of Nations added to the existing concerns.<sup>75</sup> Considering the remaining hopes that the local public had preserved for negotiations with the mandate power within the framework of the League, Germany’s position not only posed a threat to peace, but also weakened the very mechanisms of international relations that still provided some hopes for Arab independence.<sup>76</sup>

Not surprisingly, then, Germany’s political and military manoeuvres to integrate Austria into the German Reich triggered some alarms. In the light of Austrian opposition and the various conflicting interests of its neighbours, from a local perspective, the development of this conflict illustrated the persisting importance of *Machtpolitik* as a fundamental basis for European politics. The respective interests of France, Britain, Germany and Italy were identified as the sole factors guiding any possible solution of territorial conflicts.<sup>77</sup>

The principles of national sovereignty and national independence, which had been central for the establishment of the League and had furthered Arab nationalist aspirations, were increasingly called into question. The blame for this, however, was placed on different shoulders, reflecting the contradictory interpretations of the intentions and credibility of the various European powers. In fact, Germany’s claims towards its neighbours were controversially discussed. While its expansionist ambitions did cause considerable misgivings, Germany’s insistence on the national unity of its territory and population encountered much sympathy and support. The German–French dispute about the Saar region was an exemplary illustration of these conflicting assessments. As a region largely populated by Germans and occupied by France after the First World War, this area’s reunification with Germany was regarded by many as a legitimate demand of the German regime.<sup>78</sup> The ambivalence of such ambitions for territorial changes was nevertheless omnipresent, as Germany’s disputed claims to Alsace-Lorraine, Austria, Poland, and Czechoslovakia echoed in the coincidence of conflicts in the Arab East.<sup>79</sup> In a most explicit way, concern about German territorial demands was articulated by *al-Nidā’*.<sup>80</sup> Reporting on rumours of a potential unification of the Turkish-dominated region of Alexandretta with the Syrian-dominated region of Lattakia – which would considerably extend Turkish influence – the newspaper drew a parallel with Austria and insisted that ‘Alexandretta will not be annexed to Lattakia, as Austria will not be annexed to Germany.’<sup>81</sup>

Germany's territorial aspirations were not restricted to Europe. The early emphasis placed by the regime on the Saar region and the question of Austria did not exclude wider aspirations in Africa and the Middle East. Correspondingly, Germany's successes in Europe were hardly considered as satisfying Germany's vision, but rather as a first step along its path.<sup>82</sup> In this regard, Germany's shifting relations with Italy gave reason for concern amongst the Lebanese and Syrian public.<sup>83</sup> Although German debates about potential colonies were not seen as equally threatening as those that were evolving in Italy, they were nevertheless followed closely. That said, support for Syrian and Lebanese nationalist demands that was expressed by the German representative at the Permanent Mandate Commission of the League during a debate in April 1933 was favourably noted.<sup>84</sup>

Yet, Italian ambitions in the region were most pressing. In the light of the rising tensions in Europe, the fear was that France was trying to appease Italy by submitting to its demands in the Mediterranean. The mandates of Syria and Lebanon appeared as possible sacrifices that France could be tempted to surrender to keep Italy out of a possible German–Austrian–Turkish axis. French declarations regarding the future of the mandates were thus attentively scrutinized for potential hints at changes in official French politics. Although the option of an Italian mandate was rejected by most, for Arab nationalists the continuation of French control as a protection against other imperial powers was no choice either. While pro-French voices such as the Beirut daily press *La Syrie* and *L'Orient* supported the French mandate as a necessity for defending the interests of the local population against Italian and German aspirations, Arab nationalist mouthpieces sharply criticized such arguments in favour of a prolongation of French control.<sup>85</sup>

Syrian and Lebanese politics had to be carefully aligned within this international context. The polygon of interests included not only the position towards France – and its different political fractions ranging from anti-colonial to radical pro-colonial interest groups – but also towards various other international actors whose politics had to be weighted in Europe and in the mandated regions. These considerations were not limited to *realpolitik*, to pragmatic balancing aimed at a maximum realization of one's own political goals; moreover, any rapprochement with any of the European powers ultimately required justification on ideological grounds. In the end, the battle ahead was not limited to a conflict between different colonial powers; it increasingly turned into a conflict between different ideological regimes.

### **Approaching Nazism: local politics in Beirut, Damascus, Paris, and Berlin**

In March 1934, the German Auswärtige Amt ordered Germany's missions abroad to put together a list of 'known local (of host country) and foreign (non-German) anti-communist, Fascist, National Socialist, and anti-Semitic associations and organizations';<sup>86</sup> the list was intended for the ministry's future use. One month later, the German Consulate General in Beirut reported to Berlin that such 'local organizations of any relevance do not exist, even if the group of nationalist

politicians in Syria is in part pursuing anti-Semitic goals out of sympathy for the Palestinian Arabs.<sup>78</sup>

Although no organization existed that had explicitly yet drawn on National Socialist ideology, traces of Nazi thought and politics had not spared local political actors. Reactions to the German Reich as a new powerful player on the international stage were not limited to public debates and expressions of popular sympathy or objection; they even consisted of personal and organizational contacts and conflicts between representatives of the new German regime and local political and intellectual currents. Past relations between the Ottoman Empire and the German Empire under Emperor Wilhelm II had remained in the personal memory of the many local functionaries and politicians, and considerably facilitated mutual encounters. Interest in the National Socialist regime, however, not only derived from such historical relations; it was also based on a specific image of Nazi Germany as a modern, disciplined, ideologically guided, and successful organization of society. Within an atmosphere of political crisis and newly emerging political and cultural circles, Nazism appeared as a potential point of reference for organization, style, and thought. Hope for material or moral support further encouraged the willingness to engage in intellectual and personal encounters with the National Socialist regime.

### ***The German Consulate General, the mandate authorities, and the local public***

The German Consulate General in Beirut was at the centre of these diverse and often ambivalent relations. Reflecting the deep mistrust on the part of the French authorities, the French High Commissioner closely followed the activities of the German mission in Beirut and watched over its propaganda and public outreach. Supported by local representatives in Damascus and Aleppo, the Consul General in Beirut held responsibility for the preservation of German interests in both mandates under French control. While the consulate was actively attempting to strengthen Germany's reputation and to inform the local public about the vision of the new regime, the countering of rumours of direct German support for supposedly pro-Nazi local circles and organizations was one of its most pressing tasks that was clearly reflecting the consulate's peculiar position in the mandated regions.

The visit of the German member of the League of Nations' Permanent Mandate Commission to Lebanon and Syria in April 1933 was an early litmus test for German manoeuvring within this setting of local perceptions and international relations. Only weeks after his widely noticed criticism of French mandate policies during a session of the mandate commission in Geneva, Julius Ruppel and his wife spent eight days in Syria and Lebanon as part of a visit to the region.<sup>88</sup> In internal German documents and equally in public, this visit was explicitly declared 'private'.<sup>89</sup> Informing the consulate about Ruppel's travel plans, the German Auswärtige Amt had insisted that Ruppel would restrict himself to 'courtesy visits to the authorities and refrain from direct contacts with Syrian nationalist circles'.<sup>90</sup> The ministry ordered that the consulate should resolutely deny rumours that this

visit had any political relevance.<sup>91</sup> Despite such insistence on the visit's unofficial character, all sides were aware of its potential political message. Ruppel's support for Syrian unity during the latest session only added to the public interest for his stay in the region.<sup>92</sup>

Whatever the German intentions, the latest political turmoil in Damascus and Beirut shaped the local context of the journey and, together with evolving international debates about the future of the mandate, encouraged the possibility of making use of it. Recent setbacks in the negotiations between the French authorities and the National Bloc in April 1933 in Syria and the increasingly tense relations between France and the Maronite clergy, its traditional ally in Lebanon, obviously added to the concerns about the visit among the authorities, and contributed to the expectations of France's numerous local critics. Witnessing a general strike in Damascus and a large nationalist demonstration in Aleppo, the German visitor personally encountered the tense atmosphere and militancy of the conflict. Claims of a German involvement in the violent clashes in Aleppo, which had coincided with Ruppel's visit, only highlighted the significance attributed to this journey by the French authorities.

The official programme of the visit was limited largely to receptions with French officials and private tours of major towns such as Beirut, Aleppo, and Damascus. In contrast to the original intentions, however, the course of the visit produced several direct encounters with representatives of local political circles, and indeed offered opportunities for exchanges of views and assessments. These contacts were at the centre of a controversy that evolved in the days following the visit. While two longer exchanges with Maronite Archbishop Ignatius Mubārak and former Syrian Prime Minister Shaykh Tāj al-Dīn al-Hasanī passed unnoticed by the public,<sup>93</sup> two separate brief encounters with leading representatives of the National Bloc, Ibrāhīm Hanānū and Jamīl Mardam, were reported in the press and were perceived as indicating mutual interest.<sup>94</sup>

Although these encounters were favourably noted in nationalist papers, reports about these contacts raised considerable concern among German officials, fearing potential effects on German–French working relations in the region. In a brief statement by the consulate general, which was published by several Arab- and French-language newspapers, the unofficial character of the visit was emphasized as well as the close cooperation with the French authorities during its organization.<sup>95</sup> Ruppel, the statement insisted, 'did not "consult" any politicians, and only agreed to meet Mardam and Hanānū at their own request in a public hotel lobby – a meeting that was devoid of any intimacy enabling confidential exchanges.

The pretence of a lack of interest in these encounters on the German side was understood by many as an affront to the leading Arab nationalist politicians. While newspapers like *L'Orient* and *Les Echos de Damas* questioned Ruppel's intentions, the nationalist newspaper *al-Ayyām* openly voiced annoyance over the German denial of any substantial interest for exchanges with the Arab side.<sup>97</sup>

From a German perspective, the Arab nationalist insistence on an active German role in these encounters were harmful to its standing. While these meetings had

become inevitable to avoid any too open ‘snubbing’<sup>98</sup> of these personalities, public attention was increasingly perceived as counter-productive. The consul hence informed the High Commissioner about these articles and demanded that ‘these attacks should stop, and most importantly that other newspapers should refrain from taking up this story’.<sup>99</sup> Shortly afterwards, the consul was informed of the suspension of *al-Ayyām* and *Les Echos de Damas* for a period of eight days.<sup>100</sup>

Expectations for support from the new German regime were – where they existed – subject to multiple obstacles. From a German perspective, sympathy for National Socialist Germany from the local public was hardly a starting-point for practical support. In open contrast to Italian Fascism, Germany’s politics in Lebanon and Syria remained restricted to reactive and restrained activities directed at the wider public. The active and public promotion of Italian Fascist organizations through youth exchanges and cultural and sport activities was thus paralleled only by a limited German willingness to draw on Arab sympathizers and supporters. Even lectures by German visitors about general topics for local Arab audiences were avoided, fearing direct interventions or future repressions by French authorities.<sup>101</sup> While the local branch of the NSDAP/AO, the expatriate organization of the NSDAP, remained closed to Arab sympathizers,<sup>102</sup> even the organization of German language courses and the establishment of a German school in Damascus raised concerns about French reactions.<sup>103</sup>

In contrast, initiative was shown by the consulate with regard to mediated interventions in public discourses about Germany, and also for pinpointing those audiences that were expected to be receptive towards the dissemination of pro-German propaganda. In addition to newspapers, which in some cases had approached the consulate for articles and information about Nazi Germany, cinemas were among the consulate’s targets. Consulate officials carefully studied the agenda of local cinemas and on various occasions intervened directly with their directors or the High Commissioner to prevent the screening of supposedly anti-German films.<sup>104</sup>

The distribution of booklets and small pamphlets in German, French, English, or Spanish was another means to support the development ‘of a correct image of Nationalist Socialist ideas and of the situation in Germany’<sup>105</sup> in foreign public opinion, as stated in a decree issued by the Auswärtige Amt. Several brochures were circulated as well as speeches by Hitler and other leading Nazi officials.<sup>106</sup> In addition to locals, foreign consuls and employees of foreign missions as well as functionaries of the French administration were recipients of these publications.<sup>107</sup>

While in some cases the consulate warmly welcomed the idea of an Arab translation, in others the recipients of these materials were explicitly asked to consider them personal and to refrain from circulating them. The French-language booklet *L’Extension du Judaïsme en Allemagne*, whose dissemination in Cairo had provoked a lawsuit against the local German publisher for the promotion of racial hatred, was thus distributed only to a limited circle:

As the anti-Jewish mood is – as has been noted in earlier reports [to the Auswärtige Amt] – already very strong in this country, and as the law suit

in Cairo was still pending, it appeared appropriate to distribute this brochure with great care and only to hand it out to interested persons of whom it could be expected that they, for their part, would not allow it to fall into wrong hands.<sup>108</sup>

In the initial months following Hitler's takeover, the German consulate spent considerable efforts to counter reports about anti-Semitic incidents and government policies in Germany. Notwithstanding anti-Jewish sentiments harboured by parts of the local public, it appeared opportune to soften the image of an explicitly anti-Semitic world view that was driving the regime. In a public statement in response to protests by Lebanese-Jewish organizations in late March 1933, the German consul vehemently rebuffed claims of harassment and aggression against Jews in Germany: the German people, the statement said, 'are too disciplined and too respectful to the laws as to be capable of such excesses, as you are apparently thinking'.<sup>109</sup> Over the following days, the consul repeatedly attempted to diffuse the coverage about pogrom-like anti-Semitic acts, and finally even paid an official visit to the Grand Rabbi of Beirut on the occasion of the Passover that was meant to reassure the Jewish community – but no less so the non-Jewish Arab public.<sup>110</sup>

In these attempts to play down the events in Germany, the German consulate was forced to walk a tightrope not to distance itself from National Socialist ideological premises while at the same time reassuring the public of Germany's goodwill.<sup>111</sup>

Yet, German officials favourably noted the publication of an Arab translation of *Mein Kampf* in the Beirut newspaper *al-Nidā'*. Although the newspaper did not contact the consulate, let alone ask for permission prior to the translation and publication of the text, in its report to the Auswärtige Amt the consulate emphasized the quality of the translation and stressed the relevant audience for the paper. While the newspaper was classified as 'markedly Francophobe',<sup>112</sup> the family of editor Kāẓim al-Ṣulḥ was described as 'very German-friendly'.<sup>113</sup>

In an exchange of letters with the consulate, which evolved some weeks after *Mein Kampf* had been published in *al-Nidā'*, its Lebanese translator, Kāmil Murūwa, expressed his intention to publish a full book-length version of the text. Moreover he asked the German government for financial support for this plan. In a letter to the Auswärtige Amt that was posted to the consulate, Murūwa detailed his project:

It was five years ago when I heard first of the Nazi Movement [sic]. I was still in school, and although politics and political ideas were strictly prohibited, I sought in every way to learn more about it till my desire was thwarted. Two years passed, and our papers began to publish in detail the news of the movement. I used to read them with great interest and enthusiasm as all young Arabs. We admired the vigour with which the Movement was driving its way through a dim political chaos, and later on emerged victorious – due to its national basis and ideals. Last year I began my practical life as a journalist, in the national organ *an-Nida*. Once we received among the telegrams one concerning *Mein Kampf* [sic] and suddenly the idea of translating the book



occurred to me. I was sure that the book would do much in strengthening the national spirit in the Arabic speaking world which counts more than sixty million persons, all suffering from one sickness: the lack of national spirit.<sup>114</sup>

Only days earlier, the Zentralverlag der NSDAP that administered the publications and translations of *Mein Kampf* had informed the consulate that Hitler did not object to the translation in *al-Nidā'*, and that the editing house – although explicitly reserving a decision on future translations – did not intend to protest against publication.<sup>115</sup> In another report to the Auswärtige Amt, the consulate again stressed the importance of Murūwa's project.<sup>116</sup>

Despite this support on behalf of the consulate, the outcome of these exchanges remains uncertain. No information is available from the sources of the consulate about further steps taken by any of the sides involved. It is clear, however, that the question of translating Hitler's *Mein Kampf* continued to occupy German officials in Berlin, but no less so in Beirut and other Arab capitals. Interest in this text and its author obviously existed, and the German consulate in Beirut in autumn 1934 gratefully accepted the offer of the German mission in Cairo to provide dozens of copies of a book entitled *Hitler* that had been written by the Egyptian Aḥmad al-Sādāfī.<sup>117</sup>

Yet, from a German perspective, such interest was not necessarily favourable. Indeed, in some cases the consulate was sceptical of the real motivations behind it. Two publications by the Lebanese 'Umar Abū Naṣr that focused on Hitler's life and ideas mirrored this ambiguity in an exemplary fashion. While a first publication by the author – *Hitler's Struggle* – was considered by the consulate as a glorification of Hitler's life, a second booklet published only shortly afterwards was characterized as 'an inferior piece of workmanship'<sup>118</sup> that was devoid of any propagandistic value. In the light of the limited success and dissemination of this second publication, the consulate hesitated to take steps against it, fearing publicity for a book that might otherwise pass unnoticed by the general public.<sup>119</sup>

For the time being, individuals like Abū Naṣr – but others also who had been less ambivalent in their declared sympathies for Nazism and its regime – continued to be perceived by the German consulate and the involved ministries in Berlin as unreliable, at times backward or even pompous. As symbols of a nationalist movement in Syria and Lebanon, which on several occasions had been depicted as 'fanatical' by German officials, they were rarely seen as helpful contacts for Germany's policies towards the Arab regions under French rule.

### ***Communism and Nazism: between class struggle and popular front***

Germany's reputation was not only at risk of being harmed by influences from admirers whose expression was too open. Equally, those political movements that were vehemently opposed to the National Socialist regime were considered a relevant threat to Germany's standing. The Germans thus closely followed the activities of the local communist movement and keenly observed its popularity. On 9 April 1933, a group of communist activists had torn down the German flag of the consulate in Beirut and had left explicit anti-Hitler slogans on its

walls.<sup>120</sup> Over the next few days, the police confiscated posters that had been plastered in Beirut's predominantly Christian quarter Ashrafiyya in protest against Hitler and his regime.<sup>121</sup> The arrest of some of those involved in the attack on the consulate and the following lawsuit were widely reported in the local press.

Opposition to fascism had gradually shifted to the centre of ideological and strategic debates within a broader left-leaning spectrum, including not only the Syrian–Lebanese Communist Party, but other non-party affiliated workers, students, and intellectuals as well.<sup>122</sup>

In July 1931, the Central Committee of the Communist Party (CP) had published a detailed outline of its goals and visions, linking calls for national independence and the anti-colonial struggle to specific demands for an extension of the rights of workers, peasants, women, and children.<sup>123</sup> Yet, despite its emphasis on national liberation, the CP had remained at a distance from mainstream nationalist circles and continued to lack relevant popular support. Calling for a 'government of workers and peasants'<sup>124</sup> as a prerequisite for the realization of communist society, the party had long followed the strategy adopted at the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in 1928. Instead of engaging in local alliances with nationalist bourgeoisies against common colonial enemies, the congress had set front lines along the antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie: class against class.<sup>125</sup> It thus explicitly opposed any rapprochement with nationalist forces, which were considered fifth columns of imperialism itself.<sup>126</sup>

The successes of Nazism in Germany facilitated the questioning of this strategy. In Lebanon, as well as in Syria, struggles for independence and political rights were closely related. In this context, harmful consequences of the 'class against class' strategy soon became obvious. The politics of 'arabization' (*ta'rib*) of the party ranks – which was urged by the Comintern in 1932 – facilitated the popularization of the organization and its programme.<sup>127</sup> With the appointment of Khālid Bakdāsh as Secretary General, the focus of communist politics further shifted from social and political rights to the struggle for national unity of Arab lands and independence from colonial rule, further broadening the popular basis of the party.<sup>128</sup>

During these years, the Lebanese Marxist and member of the CP, Salīm Khayyāṭa, had drawn attention to the rising threats of fascist regimes.<sup>129</sup> Born in the USA as the son of a Lebanese immigrant, Khayyāṭa contributed one of the earliest Arab descriptions of fascist movements in Europe. In summer 1932, after finishing his studies at the American University of Beirut, Khayyāṭa had left Lebanon for a lengthy journey to Europe. In the resulting book *Passions of the West* that was published in late 1933, based on impressions gathered during his journey, Khayyāṭa analysed the socio-historical background of fascism and the related threats not only for Europe, but also for the Arab Middle East. As a movement of the ruling capitalist classes, he argued, the socialist and nationalist declarations of fascism were nothing but distractions from these classes' material ambitions. Accordingly, fascism was not a new regime in essence; rather, it was interpreted as an expression of bourgeois democracy itself: 'Fascism, in reality, is the daughter of democracy, in origin and function. Fascism is extreme democracy.'<sup>130</sup>

The mounting threat of fascist coups in Europe, the formation of Popular Fronts in France and Spain, and Italian preparations for an attack against Abyssinia in 1935 again highlighted the need to revise the party's isolationist strategy. In close coordination with the Comintern and the French CP, the communist movement in Lebanon and Syria set off a Committee for the Popular Struggle in Defence of Ethiopia that was explicitly meant to raise public awareness and to create broader alliances against fascism in the Arab world.<sup>131</sup> Already by March 1934, the local CP had organized a conference in Zahle that had aimed to reach out to the non-communist public, attracting even participants from the League of National Action.<sup>132</sup> This conference illustrated a growing interest to forge political alliances that had previously been discredited. Such interest was also echoed in various efforts to enhance the party's public outreach. In addition to the takeover of the renowned monthly cultural magazine *al-Duhūr*,<sup>133</sup> the organization of strikes and demonstrations extended the popular basis of its activities – and further shifted its political priorities to questions of Arab independence, national unity, and Palestine.

Internationally, the Seventh Congress of the Comintern, held in July–August 1935 in Moscow, marked a turning point, confirming the revision of past tactics whose devastating consequences had become all too visible in the defeat of political opposition in Germany.<sup>134</sup> The proceedings of the conference obviously highlighted mounting concerns, drawing particular attention to the need to unite mainstream political forces in an attempt to thwart fascist successes. The speeches by Khālīd Bakdāsh and Yūsuf Khaṭṭār al-Ḥilū, who participated in the congress, were exemplary illustrations of these considerations. Summarizing recent developments in Syria and Lebanon, Ḥilū, the delegate of the Syrian Communist Party, outlined the menace of several imperialist powers, striving to extend their influence in the Arab world. Although French imperialism and Zionism continued to be identified as the most immediate threats, fascism in its various forms closely followed suit.<sup>135</sup> Bakdāsh, who spoke on behalf of the Arab countries in general, drew similar conclusions. Emphasizing the priority of the struggle against fascism and for national independence over social issues, such as land reform and others, he also called for national alliances unifying peasants and Bedouin sheikhs as well as nationalist bourgeois forces.<sup>136</sup>

The Italian invasion of Abyssinia, which began in October 1935, gave further credibility to these strategic revisions.<sup>137</sup> As previously with Libya, the latest aggression against a predominately Muslim country – hardly covered as a mission to 'civilize' its population – illustrated the immediate dangers posed by fascist regimes. During these years, Nazism and Italian Fascism were perceived as expressions of imperialism, adding to the need for a unified stance of the nationalist anti-colonial forces; a broad front against fascism was thus seen as an obligatory part of the struggle for national independence and unity in the colonial world. The shifting perception and the strategic position adopted with regard to German Nazism and Italian Fascism hence echoed a general trend within local communist debates. As a threat to independence, the struggle against fascism increasingly served to mobilize popular support and helped linking the CP to mainstream nationalist currents.

***Nationalist politics: ideology and tactics***

Declarations of support for Syrian unity and repeated critiques of French mandate policies had gained Germany sympathizers within Syrian and Lebanese nationalist circles. Yet, in many cases sympathies were linked to concrete material and political interests, and their respective circumstances varied considerably. During the initial years of National Socialist rule, nationalist actors rarely approached representatives of the new German regime for explicit ideological reasons. Nazism and Hitler's person himself obviously attracted massive attention; nonetheless, such interest remained subject to reservations. From a local perspective, reports about racial discrimination but, even more so, Germany's far from evident ambitions in the Middle East were at the basis of persistent doubts about its cautious courting of Arab public opinion. The experience with Italy was a case in point. Although the German–Italian axis had yet to crystallize, similarities of both regimes and their shared antagonism to France and Britain were reason enough for alarm. Despite acknowledged successes in modernizing Italian society and the consolidation of Italian unity, Italian politics in the Mediterranean had, for many, revealed Fascism as just another European imperialist power. Similarly, the thrust in Germany was far from self-evident.

While Nazism triggered discussions among most, the number of political actors that were in direct contact with its regime and its local representatives remained limited. Although the files of the German Consulate General and the German *Auswärtige Amt* contain several declarations of sympathy and support, most of these were bluntly rejected. Contacts with relevant personalities and organizations nevertheless existed, and both sides – if suitable – were eager to use them.

Encounters between Maronite Archbishop Ignatius Mubārak and German representatives illustrate the complex and often contradictory motives guiding these exchanges. Although claiming to act on behalf of the Maronite community, Mubārak's contacts with officials of the National Socialist regime were anything but approved by all within Maronite circles. Rather, they echoed substantial conflicts within the Maronite community itself. After the death of patriarch Iliyās Biyār Ḥuwwayik who occupied this function between 1899 and 1931, a fierce conflict over his succession had shaken the community. The nomination of Antoine Pierre 'Arīḏa was a compromise that hardly resolved the conflicting interests of the concurring clans and interest groups.<sup>138</sup> No less tense were the community's relations with France. For decades, the Maronite church had been a major power base of French influence in the region, with French policies often pursuing interests that were supported by Maronite leaders. France's insistence on the mandate and its reluctance to take any substantial steps towards independence, added to the economic crisis and a corrupt administration, had led to growing tensions, increasingly articulated in open conflicts and opposition against a continuation of French rule.<sup>139</sup>

During the visit of the German representative at the League of Nations' Mandates Commission to Beirut in early 1933, Mubārak – who had previously depicted himself as an 'admirer of Germany', whose esteem had only been increased by

the recent ‘national uprising’<sup>140</sup> in Germany – had used the opportunity to address these inner-communal tensions. Referring to the opinion of the Maronite population in a confidential conversation with Ruppel, Mubārak bluntly declared to be ‘sick of France’.<sup>141</sup> In the light of French politics towards Lebanon, which is treated ‘worse than a colony’,<sup>142</sup> Mubārak warned of an open revolt that was to be led by himself and would aim at ending the mandate.

Such a position was not consensual amongst Maronite leaders, as can be discerned from a parallel development that went counter to any such approach. Mubārak’s initiative coincided with an explicit critical statement vis-à-vis the new German regime that was made by Patriarch ‘Arīḏa. In a pastoral letter addressed to the Maronite community in June 1933, ‘Arīḏa depicted Nazism as a dangerous threat to religious and humanitarian values, all too visible in its persecution of the Jews.<sup>143</sup> Referring to an ‘anti-religious spirit’ that in the recent past had affected not only Germany, but Bolshevik Russia, ‘Masonic Mexico’, and Spain as well, Christian sympathies for the persecuted Jews in Nazi Germany were considered by ‘Arīḏa as an echo of the spirit of the Gospels.

While various Jewish representatives in Lebanon, Syria and Egypt welcomed this criticism of German anti-Jewish policies, immediate reactions in the non-Jewish population were characterized by objection.<sup>144</sup> Reportedly, copies of the letter that were distributed in Beirut were re-collected only hours later by official circles, supposedly out of fear that knowledge of its content might further encourage Zionists to exploit the Patriarch’s humanist feelings.

Opposition to ‘Arīḏa’s letter was not limited to Arab nationalist spectra, but was expressed within the Maronite community itself – with Mubārak being one of the most vocal voices among these critics. During the furore provoked by the Patriarch’s statement, news of a sharply worded written response by the Archbishop circulated in the press. While submitting to the Patriarch in religious questions, Mubārak insisted on his right to differ in worldly affairs, expressing sharp objection to ‘Arīḏa’s political message:

When we [the bishops] elected you [as patriarch], we did not elect a patriarch of the Jews. You neglected the interests of your people and of our country, and were [instead] more interested in the clique of Jews. This is in violation of the politics of the father of the believers, the holy father.<sup>145</sup>

Such statements reflected profound disagreements within the Maronite clergy about the positioning of the community with regard to changing regional and international relations. Openly challenging ‘Arīḏa’s authority, Mubārak’s opening towards Germany was part of a strategy directed against the Patriarch and the mandate. Other encounters between the German consulate and Arab personalities were characterized by similar sets of interests, reservations, and ideological considerations. As in Lebanon, France’s standing in Syria had deteriorated steadily and by early 1933 had reached a state of open conflict. The strategy of ‘honourable cooperation’ that was adopted by the National Bloc in its relations with the French authorities and the integration of radical nationalist voices into the structure of the organization had

facilitated the administration of daily political conflicts, and offered a framework for negotiations that were expected to lead to a final agreement with France. The ultimate failure of these negotiations and the resignation of Jamīl Mardam from government by late April 1933 proved these expectations wrong.<sup>146</sup>

From a German perspective, representatives of the National Bloc served as an important source for an assessment of the situation and of developing conflicts. The German Consulate General expressed interest in personal encounters and exchanges about nationalists' views, goals, and strategies. Yet, none of the representatives of Syrian nationalist organizations appeared to have won profound sympathies, let alone support from German officials. Even personalities who had personal relations with the consulate were perceived with scepticism. Serving as a contact for German activities in the region, 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Bīsār, a leading Arab nationalist from Tripoli who was married to a German woman, was not spared disparaging remarks in internal papers. Following violent clashes between supporters of Bīsār and members of a concurring nationalist grouping, the consulate noted with consternation the 'upsurge of primitive passions and the style of solving hostilities between the clans that are known from the Middle Ages; casting profound doubts on the 'political maturity of the Syrian people'.<sup>147</sup>

Similar reservations were expressed about the leading member of the National Bloc, Ibrāhīm Hanānū – a 'fanatic idealist'<sup>148</sup> as the consulate suspected. As with other representatives of the Bloc, such as Jamīl Mardam and 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Kayyālī, Hanānū was a welcome source for gaining insight into Syrian politics. In early 1934, von Walther, a consulate official, had personally met with Hanānū in an attempt to learn about recent decisions and the Bloc's stance on the future political system of the Syrian state. While being ambivalent about the possible creation of a Syrian monarchy, Hanānū explicitly insisted on the need for a democratic constitution that would grant parliament extensive rights and limit those of the president. In his report to the Auswärtige Amt, the German diplomat alluded to a vague request expressed by Hanānū for political council regarding ongoing 'greater international developments'.<sup>149</sup> Yet, such interest for advice on Hanānū's part did not exceed the exploration of potential strategic options in case of an escalation of the conflict with the French authorities. In fact, Hanānū's firm defence of parliamentary democracy during the conversation could itself be understood as a comment on recent developments in Germany.

Other sources further allow for assessment of Hanānū's position. Referring to a conversation in 1933, Aḥmad Nahād al-Ṣayyāf, a close associate of Hanānū at the time, recounts observations made by Hanānū about Hitler. Asked about his opinion about German Reich Chancellor, Hanānū had reportedly retorted: 'Hitler does not matter!'<sup>150</sup> According to him, German society was in itself inspired by ideals that had brought about its national leaders. In Arab societies, Hanānū had added, the situation was different; here it was society that was formed by its leaders:

Muḥammad had formed Arab society, taking her from a nomad's life and from ignorance to civilization. In contrast, it was Germany that had created

Hitler, and before him [the German people had created] Bismarck and other heroes.<sup>151</sup>

In the light of the contemporary state of Arab societies whose civilization had reverted back to desert life, Hanānū questioned the impact of an Arab leader following Hitler's path:

My message today is to rebuild Arab society and to define its ideals. To push society to live far from those low values that are guiding our society today – these defeatist ideals that were spread by the attacking states following the breakdown of Arab rule [in 1920]. To summarize: wide is the gap between a nation generating fame and creating leaders, and [those societies whose] leaders [have to] create a nation and to give her a message. Be sure, if Hitler would have lived here [in Syria], he would have remained a painter.<sup>152</sup>

While acknowledging Hitler's successes, the unwavering will of the German nation to recreate itself and to pursue its ideal was at the basis of its ascendancy. Hitler, then, was a mere expression of the nation's strength, rather than its source. Far from longing for an alliance with the German regime, from this perspective, Hitler's rise to power provided few immediate lessons.

Similarly, ideological lessons were no priority in the encounters of Shakīb Arslān with the German regime; he explicitly struggled for material assistance and the creation of a strategic German–Arab alliance in support of Arab independence. Serving as the head of the Syrian–Palestinian delegation to the League of Nations in Geneva, Arslān had long since been an admirer of Germany and had kept close contacts with various German officers and politicians. Summarizing Arslān's own words, a German official once noted that Arslān had depicted himself as 'the most long-standing Arab friend Germany possessed, one who had for forty-seven years been preaching the community of interests between that country and the Islamic world.'<sup>153</sup>

This friendship dated back to the German Empire under Wilhelm II and continued despite the political changes during the Weimar Republic and under National Socialist rule. Referring to Wilhelm II in an article for his monthly journal *La Nation Arabe* in January 1935, Arslān stated:

[We] are able to declare, and no impartial and objective observer could question this:

1. that the 400 million Muslims who represent one-fifth of the human family do not feel any grievance towards Germany, and that therefore, in general, they have sympathies for the Germans and 2. that this situation which the Germans are enjoying in all Muslim countries is due to the personal politics of the former emperor of Germany, and to no other reasons.<sup>154</sup>

Arslān, a Lebanese born into a Druze family, had been a strong supporter of the Ottoman Empire, and nurtured harsh sentiments against the Hashemite ruler for

his support of the Arab revolt during the First World War. Having been expelled from Arab lands since 1919, Arslān continued to play a major role in the Levant.<sup>155</sup> In European exile, his defence of the Ottoman Empire increasingly turned into a mission ‘to internationalize the issues facing the Arab-Islamic lands under European domination’.<sup>156</sup> This mission included the search for supporters and the carving out of alliances that would help to achieve his Arab-Islamic nationalist aspirations. While there were opponents in the Middle East as well, Britain and France continued to figure as the main obstacles in Arslān’s strategy of liberation. In contrast, Arslān consistently tried to foster Arab relations to Germany on the one hand, and to Italy on the other.

In the eyes of many, the brutal repression of the Libyan population in 1931 had discredited Italian Fascism as a possible ally. Since April that year, demonstrations and strikes in protest of Italian massacres of civilians had shaken Lebanese and Syrian towns; in Beirut, the local *fatwa* committee had decided to boycott Italian public services in Lebanon.<sup>157</sup> Notwithstanding these events and the broad opposition against Italian policies, by the end of 1933 Arslān had opted for a conciliatory position towards Mussolini. Following Italian attempts to improve its standing in the Arab-Islamic world and to appease its population, Arslān had raised several concerns regarding Italian politics in a written exchange with Mussolini, and had benevolently considered Mussolini’s response.<sup>158</sup> In December 1933, Arslān finally contributed to the Second Congress of Asian Students in Rome that was widely perceived as part of Mussolini’s strategy to reassure the Islamic *umma* and to pave the way for a coming intervention in Abyssinia.<sup>159</sup>

The controversial character of these relations and the public awareness of the implied threat of being drawn into an Italian sphere of influence became even more evident during an episode in spring 1935: a letter reproduced in a Palestinian newspaper that was attributed to Arslān – wrongly, as he insisted – had provoked sharp public reactions.<sup>160</sup> In this letter to Palestinian Mufti Amīn al-Ḥusaynī, the author informed Ḥusaynī about an Arab–Italian agreement that was envisaging the spread of pro-Italian propaganda in the Arab countries. Urging the mufti to confront Britain in its policies towards Palestine, Arslān explicitly called for support of an Arab–Italian alliance. Despite Arslān’s efforts to prove the letter a forgery, even his supporters admitted that the implied strategy could well have been formulated by Arslān.

Arslān’s contacts with German officials were less exposed to the public. While his visit to Rome had sparked various reactions in the local press, his visit to Berlin in November 1934 had passed unnoticed. Together with his collaborator Iḥsān al-Jābirī, on several occasions Arslān had contacted the head of the Orient department of the Auswärtige Amt, Curt Prüfer, requesting an audience with Hitler. In the light of growing tensions in German–French relations, Arslān insisted that Germany would be well advised to make provisions for the inevitable war to come. In a report about one meeting, Prüfer recounted Arslān as saying:

The natural allies in Germany’s struggle with France are the Arabs, who are suppressed by the French in Morocco, Algiers, Tunis, and Syria. France is



recruiting a relevant part of her army in these countries. If these French soldiers of Arab nationality were to be lost through passive resistance, or even actively turn against France, Germany would have gained a big advantage.<sup>161</sup>

Pointing to the mutual risks of such cooperation, which, if uncovered, would seriously harm Germany's relations with France, Prüfer insisted that neither the German nor the Arab side was able to provide one another with substantial support. In his internal notes, however, Prüfer added profound doubts about the very basis of such mutual German–Arab assistance. Referring to failed efforts during the First World War to instigate a *jihad* against Britain, Prüfer concluded that Arab populations had not proven to be reliable partners. A few days after the meeting, Arslān and Jābirī thus again visited Prüfer, who now formally notified them that the German government was unable to respond positively to their request: neither an audience with Hitler, nor support for the duo's plan of an Arab–German cooperation would be granted.<sup>162</sup>

Despite its reservations, the German foreign ministry continued to value Arslān's 'loyalty' and 'friendship' to Germany,<sup>163</sup> leaving the door open for future contacts and cooperation. Arslān himself did not see the rejection of his proposal as a test to his sympathies. While he was infuriated at accusations of selling out the Arab cause to Italy and Germany, he was far from considering an end to his 'management of European rivalries', as William L. Cleveland had described his manoeuvres between the various powers in the interest of his Arab-Islamic mission.<sup>164</sup> In this strategy, the growing fissure between the Germany of Wilhelm II and the reality of National Socialist Germany did nothing to change his preference for the German power.

### *Anṭūn Sa'āda and the SNP: a 'pure nationalist regime'*

On 16 November 1935, the arrest of the leadership of the clandestine Syrian Nationalist Party (*al-ḥizb al-sūrī al-qawmī*) marked a notable shift of public perceptions of Nazi Germany and its ideological vision. The exposure of the party itself had steered considerable debates.<sup>165</sup> Charged with plotting against the state and the existing order, the SNP and its charismatic leader Anṭūn Sa'āda were accused of having entertained close relations with the German and Italian missions in Beirut; in addition, the party was openly depicted as echoing Nazi and Fascist ideology and style. Yet, for the first time, such charges were not limited to an agency of European fascism, but instead focused on a supposedly authentic fascist core of a local organization. Ideologically, from this point of view, the party reflected authoritarian and anti-democratic concepts that were submitting the individual to the absolute interest of the national community. Organizationally, the undisputed role of the *za'īm*, the leader, and the paramilitary style of the party itself seemed to confirm suspicions that the organization had indeed been in contact with one or both European fascist regimes.

These charges, which were ultimately dropped during the upcoming trial, were dispelled by an official exchange of letters in which Germany denied having any relations

with the party.<sup>166</sup> In January 1936, Sa'āda was convicted for having formed a clandestine party, and was sentenced to six months in prison. Links to Italian or German representatives were not mentioned in the verdict.<sup>167</sup> Yet, with ever more information about the party becoming available, rumours about such relations persisted.<sup>168</sup>

The Syrian Nationalist Party<sup>169</sup> was secretly created in November 1932 by Sa'āda, then 28 years old, who had returned to Lebanon in 1930 after a stay of several years in Sao Paolo.<sup>170</sup> Having received permission to use the facilities of the American University of Beirut, Sa'āda offered private German and Arabic courses to students of the university and to members of the foreign diplomatic corps. By 1933, Sa'āda began re-publishing the monthly journal *al-Majalla*, which had earlier been published by his father in Brazil. Membership of the party, which in its early stages remained confined to students of the AUB, considerably widened during the following years. With party cells existing in Damascus, Tripoli, and elsewhere, by early 1935 the number of followers far exceeded one thousand.

Notwithstanding this secrecy, articles from *al-Majalla* and – even more importantly – speeches and programmatic papers written by Sa'āda allow the analysis of key ideological concepts that contributed to the popularity of the party. In a speech held on 1 June 1935, at a secret meeting of the organization, Sa'āda had outlined his vision. The speech offered an interpretation of the state of crisis in the region, all the while depicting the creation of the party as a turning point of history. The party's appeal was formulated in rather messianic terms:

During these days, when the nations fight for their existence, and at this time of crisis, when our people face corruption, division and national destruction, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party [SNP] – much as dawn rises from the darkest hours of the night – is standing up to proclaim a new principle – the principle of the will: the will of a living people who want to rule over themselves and their nation to realize their highest ideals.<sup>171</sup>

The need for a revival and the 'shaping of our new national life'<sup>172</sup> was the basic task of the movement that aimed at a recreation of the Syrian nation according to its destiny. The party was thus not meant to represent the interest of a particular section of the people; rather, it was its pure and authentic expression as a whole.

Contemporary thinkers of various nationalist movements repeatedly voiced the desire to overcome a supposed state of corruption. German history, for many, symbolized the national will to surpass periods of cultural decline and political division. One of the noticeable aspects of Sa'āda's early political writings lies in such preoccupation with German national history. During the 1920s, as an assistant to his father in Brazil, Sa'āda had contributed numerous articles to *al-Majalla* dealing with the development of German nationalism and German political and philosophical thought. Articles about Wilhelm II and the German General Ludendorff and commentaries about the German question following the First World War highlighted his interest in this country. Disputing the claim of a British journalist in 1924 who had doubted the very existence of a German nation after the First World War, Sa'āda emphatically took Germany's side:

Germany continues to be a state and a nation, and it still feels oppressed and unhappy. Germany has no other choice but to long for revenge against those who have caused its oppression and misfortune. ... If one day Germany will be able to take revenge on those who had worked for her oppression and on those who had caused its sorrow, Germany should be in no way scolded. Instead Germany would have acted according to the laws and rules of life under such circumstances.<sup>173</sup>

The German example, Sa'āda argued, was no less relevant under Hitler's rule. In March 1933, *al-Majalla* had published a speech given by Sa'āda four months earlier at a function of the cultural club *al-'Urwa al-Wuthqā* at the AUB. In this speech, which was entitled 'Fundamental Principles of National Education', he had called for an elimination of 'intruded' (*dakhīla*) ideological concepts that in the past had weakened the authentic national spirit: 'The living nations that have proven their ability to survive and to preserve their national entity are those nations which were able to guard the principles of its people from those which are alien to it.'<sup>174</sup> Here, the revival of modern Germany is explicitly referred to as an example for the prospects of a nation that had managed to 'purify' its thought and its pattern of life.<sup>175</sup>

Equally important, however, was the role of the leader and the related authoritarian organization of the party. The autobiographical literature of members of the early SNP illustrates the charisma of Sa'āda personally, and the fascination of the highly loaded symbols used to add a mystical dimension to membership, mission, and commitment.<sup>176</sup> In addition to Sa'āda's personal appeal to his followers, the role of the leader was an essential part of the ideological complex as such; in the words of 'Abdallāh Qubruṣī, an early member of the party: 'Leadership was an institution, not a person.'<sup>177</sup> According to the party's principles that were formulated by Sa'āda in 1934, both the members and their leader were bound to the party by respective oaths. The members of the party were not only tied to equals struggling for the same cause, but – through the party's leader – to the very cause of the Syrian nation as such.<sup>178</sup>

Striking, then, is Sa'āda's conceptualization of leadership in relation to democracy. Facing internal criticism from members of the party, Sa'āda elaborated on the subject:

What is democracy? ... Is it not to accept or to reject something based on an absolute free choice? Is not the acceptance of this leadership – based on this principle – by thousands, who have become members of this party, the biggest referendum that testifies on their practice of democratic principles in their choice? ... The leader is no dictator; the leader is the highest and greatest institution built on free and voluntary service that originates in deep personal conviction and mature consciousness and awareness.<sup>179</sup>

Such a new order of national revival based on a submission of the individual to the party, which itself was nothing but the nation's voice and hand, was symbolized in

the four virtues that stood for the party's mission: freedom, duty, discipline, and power. The symbol of the party, the *zawba'a*, was said to epitomize these virtues, with each of the four arms of the swastika-like icon standing for one of them.<sup>180</sup>

This symbol and the ideological resemblances of the organization to Nazism and Italian Fascism had deepened the suspicions about the party. Sa'āda himself was aware of such charges, and tried to address them. During his speech on 1 June 1935, which preceded the public exposure of the party and the following accusations in the press, Sa'āda declared:

I also want to use this opportunity to say that the system of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party is neither a Hitlerite nor a Fascist one, but a pure social nationalist one. It is not based on useless imitation, but is [instead] the result of an authentic invention – [an ability] which is a virtue of our people.<sup>181</sup>

In a 'pure nationalist system', Sa'āda claimed, there was no room for explicit references to outside ideological sources and starting points: the Syrian nationalist ideology was Syrian in essence.

Sa'āda's stance mirrored the ambivalences of nationalist approaches to Nazism during these early years of Nazi rule. The very idea of an authentic national ideology went counter to admissions of conceptual resemblances and intellectual inspirations.

In a much more general sense, nationalist actors faced additional obstacles that proved no less challenging for any rapprochement to the German regime. The development of National Socialist rule was followed by many with scarcely concealed fascination, for, in this perspective, it had given back strength and spirit to a defeated nation; yet, the events in Germany entailed political messages with regard to the local, regional and international political order as well: already at this early stage, the revival of the German nation was directly tied to massive internal repression and external aggressions. For most observers, the balancing of these facets did not allow for explicit endorsements.

Public interest in the developments in Germany echoed these contradictory aspects of the emerging international power. The enormous number of articles and reports covering political developments in Germany illustrate local concerns for the new regime that went far beyond strategic assessments of potential repercussions in the Middle East. Instead, the variety of the issues, which were addressed in these assessments of National Socialist politics, revealed the immediate topicality of Nazi Germany's ideological claims.

Local political actors were aware of such claims and of public debates that emerged around them. While political forces such as the National Bloc stood for traditional strata lacking any clear-cut ideological vision, the emergence of the Communist Party, the SNP and the League of National Action were early signs of a mounting sophistication and diversification of intellectual debates on political and social change. The positioning of the respective actors vis-à-vis the German regime thus increasingly reflected ideological messages as well. The restoration of constitutional life in Lebanon and Syria and the election of a nationalist government in Damascus in late 1936 gave additional momentum to these controversies.

### 3 Nazism and the Levant – Nazism in the Levant

#### Between treaty negotiations and the Second World War (1936–1939)

‘The Iron Shirts are neither Fascist nor Nazi, but a force of reform!’<sup>1</sup> This headline ran in an editorial that was published in the Damascene daily *al-Sha‘b* in late September 1936. In defence of the clandestine Syrian Nationalist Party, a similar argument had been proposed earlier by Anṭūn Sa‘āda. This time, it was expressed in support of an outlet of a mainstream political organization. By autumn 1936, charges of fascist inclinations were no longer limited to the margins of the political spectrum, but were levelled against some major nationalist actors.

During the later months of 1936, *al-Sha‘b*, a voice of the National Bloc that was supportive of the Bloc’s recently formed youth organization, the Iron Shirts (*al-qumṣān al-ḥadīdiyya*), frequently featured articles that tended to distance nationalist politics from suspicions of Nazi German or Italian Fascist involvement. In the crucial phase of French–Syrian treaty negotiations in Paris, the National Bloc and its affiliated circles had to balance changing local conditions and to the persistent requirements of fragile French–Syrian relations. The general strike that started in late January 1936 had shut down the country for several weeks. The public objection to French politics had ultimately pressured France to submit to negotiation. Facilitated by the formation of the Popular Front government in Paris in June, an agreement that would lead to an end of the mandate and national independence appeared within ever closer reach. From the perspective of the National Bloc, such prospects justified a moderation of the nationalist agitation. In contrast, the League of National Action intensified its campaigns. The expected outcome of these negotiations in Paris, which implied a formalization of the Lebanese–Syrian borders and a continuation of French military and administrative influence in both states, provided powerful stimuli for radical pan-Arab groupings that were challenging the predominance of moderate nationalist organizations.

During this period, such challenge was both ideological and organizational. The general strike in early 1936 had highlighted the emergence of youth organizations as a driving force for political action. In Lebanon, the tensions preceding the signing of the treaty in November reflected a similar development. As in Syria, Christian and Muslim youth organizations spearheaded the political struggle. Protests by workers’ and women’s organizations in the late 1920s had marked the beginning of urban mass politics; by now, the effective and leading role of youth

in the Syrian strike and the local Lebanese conflicts had taken these developments to a new level. The tensions of 1936 tested not only the position of France, but of traditional notable politics as well. Ideologically, these conflicts were no less decisive. The formation of a National Bloc-led government in Damascus in November deepened the split of the Arab national movement into two major currents. While the majority of the Bloc had submitted to the creation of a Syrian state and for pragmatic relations with France, supporters of pan-Arab ambitions elaborated on their political visions and intensified their struggle for public opinion.

In this context, Nazi Germany continued to serve as a prominent point of reference. The local and regional political turmoil added to the interest in Germany as a potential source of inspiration. Such interest and fascination, however, was not beyond doubt. In the light of a growing insight into the ideological and political premises of National Socialist politics, references to Germany lay at the core of controversial public debates about future political and ideological orientations.

These debates reflected various levels of encounters with the new German regime. On a phenomenological level, these included influences of National Socialist style and organization among the local youth. Prominent leaders of nationalist formations had explicitly drawn on the experience of the Hitler Youth to outline the importance of their organizations. While none of these formations openly identified with Nazism, adaptations to National Socialist styles, for them, appeared as legitimate choices. On an organizational level, local political actors began taking concrete political decisions in relation to Germany and German politics. Reflecting their specific political claims and ideological visions, these circles situated themselves in the local, regional, and international contexts of the time. In this regard, National Socialist thought had left obvious traces on local intellectual discourses as well. Debates about Nazism were increasingly less limited to the daily press, but resonated also in lengthy contributions to cultural and academic journals and books.

While each of these facets of local encounters with Nazism requires an analysis in its own right, they were necessarily linked in the local political culture. Given the evolving public knowledge about German politics and the awareness of the ideological and strategic challenges posed by the German regime, negotiations and personal encounters with its representatives tended to entail an explicit political message. In the contemporary context, questions of political organization and of a forging of alliances were closely related to a general quest for a future political order.

### **Mobilizing the youth and the fascist experiment**

In July 1937, the French director of the Lycée de Beyrouth presented a lecture on the scout movement in the Muslim world. Speaking at a seminar in Paris, the director highlighted the political interests that had led European governments to support the formation of the scouts: 'They have understood that it is via the youth that a return to the national traditions is the easiest'.<sup>2</sup> Arab governments had in

the recent past followed suit; yet, in the Arab world the movement had gradually deviated from its enlightened origins and its peaceful goals:

Scoutism in the Orient is opposed to everything that is not Arab; contradicting its real principles, it tends to uniformize the individual. You can see few camps in nature, few exercises in physical and mental training. ... Not only is this movement a paramilitary one, it is in nearly all cases a political and nationalist one. It goes into a direction that is opposite to its real self. This scoutism, which could be a unifying factor for the various youth groups in Lebanon and Syria, only adds to the difficulties [of these countries].<sup>3</sup>

This assessment of the local scout movement reflected concerns of the French authorities that was facing an increasingly well-organized nationalist youth. Yet, the uniformization of the individual and submission to the higher interest of the organization were not limited to scouts; other groups had begun taking this trend to its authoritarian extremes.

The striking features of these organizations were their public appearances, the staging of strict discipline and order, and the militant expression of their political demands. Parading in uniforms and military-style formations, these groups stood for the interest articulated among the public for similar trends in Europe and the Americas. The detailed coverage of these currents ultimately encouraged similar initiatives in the French mandated territories. By the mid-1930s, youth organizations of various kinds had established themselves as important players. In addition to branches of the scout movement, whose origins went back to the years preceding the First World War,<sup>4</sup> other youth organizations were created with explicit political ambitions. As expressions and promoters of contemporary political trends, these organizations were often linked to parties and blocs, and in some cases even tended to adopt party-like structures. Serving as a framework for the development of personal commitment and individual loyalty towards the community, their activities were not restricted to physical education. Instead, the presence of youth formations of diverse orientations had become a normal sight at political functions, demonstrations, strikes, and festivities. Their public appearances and organizational particularities marked a distinct character within the existing spectrum of local forces; yet, they were neither simple outlets of established political parties and alliances, nor completely unrelated to the existing pattern of social and political actors. Emerging in predominantly urban contexts, they combined activism with an elitist outlook, manoeuvring in a political field spanning ‘parties and gangs’<sup>5</sup> and filling a void that was neither accessible to traditional notable politics, nor to the *qabāḍayāt*, the uneducated gang leaders and strongmen of the old-town quarters.

### *The Iron Shirts and the White Badge*

In Syria, the Iron Shirts were the most visible exponents of these emerging forces.<sup>6</sup> Speaking at a training camp of the organization in summer 1937, Fakhrī Barūdī, a

popular Damascene leader of the National Bloc and one of the group's initiators, gave an insight into the context of its creation:

This blessed movement [of the Iron Shirts] beautifies us, and great hopes are built on it, for the youth is the hidden power of all peoples. For men of politics it is a given fact that Mussolini would not have been successful without the Italian youth, and that Hitler had pursued a particular effort to organize the German youth and to unite all of them in one party, and to appoint them one leader, which is [*Reichsjugendführer*] von Schirach.<sup>7</sup>

Already in 1929, Barūdī had encouraged the creation of the National Youth (*al-shabāb al-waṭani*) in an attempt to establish a youthful grouping that would help attract younger generations to the politics of the National Bloc. Institutionally, the organization was to serve as a nucleus of a national army in a future independent state.<sup>8</sup> In the immediate aftermath of the general strike in January and February 1936, the Iron Shirts were formed as a paramilitary branch of the National Youth. The events of the strike had been marked by the participation of young people from most social and political spectra, which in its extent and vehemence had been uncommon in the past. The often violent demonstrations were led by an educated youth that was far from controlled by the National Bloc and its representatives, and on various occasions acted independently of direct organizational loyalties and affiliations.<sup>9</sup>

Challenging the rather apolitical scout troops and, no less so, the mounting influence of the League of National Action amongst the unorganized youth, the Iron Shirts were meant to lead the battles on the streets – ideologically through political instruction, public events, and national celebrations, but no less so in violent clashes with competing formations. With an estimated membership of up to 15,000 young people in late 1936, the Iron Shirts had established themselves as an effective force in most Syrians towns. In the perception of the Arab public, but also in the eyes of the French security apparatus, they contributed considerably to nationalist agitation of these months.<sup>10</sup>

A striking feature that was shared by the Iron Shirts with other local organizations was its sophisticated choice of uniform and salute. The military style combination of trousers and, in the case of the Iron Shirts, grey shirts with a black tie visually echoed the outlook of youth organizations in Europe. The characteristic Roman salute, which was practised with slight nuances by both Nazi and Fascist movements, was appropriated by the Iron Shirts as well.<sup>11</sup> Although neither the uniform nor the salute were exclusively linked to fascist movements,<sup>12</sup> the explicit placing of the movement by its leaders within the context of European fascist organizations obviously promoted such an interpretation. Nevertheless, variations and significant differences existed. In the Aleppine context, for instance, the symbolic levelling of social status through uniforms, which was characteristic for most would-be mass movements, was not consistently adopted. Dividing the educated *effendiyya*-youth from those of poorer social backgrounds – visibly through modified uniforms, but also spatially by separating these groups during



their marches – the homogenizing element of such formations that was typical for both Nazism and Fascism was limited by persisting social classifications.<sup>13</sup>

Leaders of the Iron Shirts were well aware of the ambiguous use of fascist symbolism, and skilfully managed to place the organization on stage, depending on the respective public and political context. Munīr ‘Ajlānī, the appointed Secretary General of the organization, had frequently articulated his fascination for Hitler’s resolute will to rule and his authoritarian regime. ‘Ajlānī’s fervent nationalism and his insistence on military order and individual loyalty to national interest manifested itself in the structures and conduct of his organization. In his words, ‘order [was] the source of the power of the people’,<sup>14</sup> the paramilitary formation of the youth was thus a national obligation.

In such discourses, the youthful and modernizing images of Kemalism and Bolshevism were similar references that were alluded to; Nazism, however, continued to serve as a major source of inspiration. In an unsigned text published in the Damascus magazine *al-Muṣawwar*, which was apparently a lengthy reproduction of Barūdī’s speech mentioned above, the need for an authoritarian education and organization of the youth was explicitly tied to the biological preservation of the nation.<sup>15</sup> Part of the training process in Germany, Barūdī noted, was the screening of films that advised the youth to wed ‘good [*sāliḥa*] women’ and to refrain from engaging with ‘sick Jewish women’.<sup>16</sup> While few documents exist about the actual ideological formation of the Iron Shirts, such speeches reveal the impetus of its leaders and the perceived context of the organization’s creation and allow an insight into its strategic ambitions and ideological concepts.

Fascination with fascist style and organization was not necessarily a unifying factor, but instead could further aggravate existing conflicts. In multi-confessional Aleppo, the formation of the Catholic Christian youth organization of the White Badge (*al-shāra al-bayḍā*) only added to the existing tensions between Christian and Muslim communities. In light of the French–Syrian negotiations in summer 1936, concern among pro-French Christians about their future status in a Sunni-Muslim-dominated Syrian state mounted considerably, and ultimately encouraged Catholic middle-class merchants and local clerics to seek protection in a new powerful organization. With at one point 3,500 members, the White Badge temporarily established itself as a force concurring in both number and visibility with the Iron Shirts.<sup>17</sup>

Yet, open clashes with the Iron Shirts in October 1936 led to its ultimate decline. The so-called Sunday-market incident in Aleppo, whose immediate causes remain undetermined, was caused by a confrontation between the two formations, which left several persons dead and dozens injured. Such disturbances proved neither in the interest of the Muslim nor the Christian middle-classes, and ultimately raised concern about the stability of the existing social order and the political predominance of its traditional leaders. Following the clashes, leaders of the Bloc attempted to reassure the Christian population about its well-being in a future Syrian state. Meanwhile, French authorities raided the White Badge’s headquarters and arrested some of its members.<sup>18</sup>

The incident in Aleppo proved counter-productive for the Iron Shirts as well. While the vehemence of its appearance and its popularity among the youth might

have served specific interests of the Bloc to mobilize the population, its growing attractiveness and radicalization posed an increasing threat to the traditional leadership of the party. The modified climate following the French–Syrian agreement in summer 1936 and the establishment of a Bloc-dominated government in Syria further limited the role of a paramilitary force. In the context of the changing political scenery in France, the bloc withdrew its support for the Iron Shirts, turning its back on an organization that it had created as a mobilizing force and the backbone of its agitation.

### *Lebanese Phalangists, al-Najjāda, and the Olympic Games*

Such conflicts were not limited to the Syrian scene, but were as much visible in Lebanon. In the context of the French–Lebanese negotiations, the respective fears of the various communities had facilitated the organization of the youth along sectarian lines. While such sectarianism often remained implicit and was denied in public by its leaders, the make-up of the membership and the political action of most political groupings revealed clear communal inclinations.

The Lebanese Phalangists (*al-katā'ib al-lubnāniyya*) were the most prominent of these organizations, and one of the longest prevailing. The specific background of its creation in autumn 1936 reveals the various influences that had led to its formation and that had substantiated persisting accusations of strong fascist ambitions. In the light of the ongoing negotiations with France and the resurgent calls for unity with Syria from Lebanese Muslims, Christian personalities such as George Naccache and Charles Hélou, the founders of the daily newspapers *L'Orient* and *Le Jour* respectively, were keen to establish an effective force to foster Lebanese nationalist identity and to bridge the existing cleavages amongst prominent Maronite personalities that had blocked unified action.<sup>19</sup> Pierre Gemayel, a 31-year old pharmacist and president of the Fédération Libanaise de Football, shared these intentions. For him, physical education was a political issue, allowing the youth to take action and to contribute to the needs of the nation.

In this regard, the organization of the Hitler Youth in Germany provided important inspiration. In summer 1936, Gemayel headed a delegation to Germany that was to participate in an international soccer conference in Berlin on 13–14 August 1936.<sup>20</sup> Yet, the Olympic Games in Berlin, which coincided with the visit, proved politically and organizationally even more stimulating. As countries under mandate, Lebanon and Syria were not officially invited to the Olympics; the international event nevertheless fascinated and inspired the local public.<sup>21</sup> Already by summer 1935 the German Consulate General in Beirut had noted the evolving public interest; although a formal accreditation was impossible for Syrian and Lebanese nationals, the consulate was approached from various sides for information and support.<sup>22</sup> Journalists, businessmen, schools, and youth organizations seriously considered a visit. In addition to several individuals, a group of pupils from the private 'École Siddik' in Beirut finally left for Berlin.<sup>23</sup>

The Games were covered in detail in the local press, with both Arab and French language newspapers publishing reports about the ceremonies and competitions. Rashād al-Barbīr, a correspondent for the Lebanese *Le Jour* reported from Berlin and provided euphoric accounts of his visit. In one of the reports, Barbīr exposed Lebanese readers to the overwhelming atmosphere of the event: 'It is difficult to describe the scenery; you have to experience it yourself.'<sup>24</sup> Yet, it was not only emotion that had guided Barbīr's description; equally important and at the core of Barbīr's articles was the appeal of an organized youth and its physical education as an element of national strength.<sup>25</sup>

Similar views were expressed in other reports as well. 'Ārif al-Ḥabbāl, a physical education teacher from Beirut who had visited Germany already a year earlier, again left for Berlin in summer 1936. Spending some time in a Hitler Youth camp, Ḥabbāl recounted his views and impressions in articles for the Lebanese newspapers *al-Nahār* and others.<sup>26</sup> Admiration for Germany's efforts to turn the youth into a driving force of national revival lay at the centre of his descriptions. Introducing a series of Ḥabbāl's reports from Germany, the newspaper *Abābīl* drew attention to the successes of Nazism, explicitly claiming a model function of German efforts and reforms. In the light of Ḥabbāl's accounts from Germany, *Abābīl* voiced the hope that the local Arab youth, which had just begun organizing itself, would turn into a 'new creature' that could protect this

wretched country, still stumbling in its social and political life for tens, for hundreds of years. The new generation must be strong in its spirit, strong in its will and strong in its body, revealing the characteristic traits of manhood in everything it is undertaking.<sup>27</sup>

Preoccupation with physical education of the nation was thus closely linked to the importance given to the youth as a major political actor.

Before leaving for Berlin, Gemayel had voiced his intention to study the variety of modern youth organizations in Europe and to profit from his visit by encountering local soccer clubs and learning from their structure and training methods. The Hitler Youth, the Italian Fascist organizations, and also youth organizations in Czechoslovakia and Austria had attracted his attention.<sup>28</sup> Alluding to the organization of European soccer clubs, Gemayel stated that 'we hope and would love to see amongst our sportsmen this blind submissiveness, this awareness for the general interest'<sup>29</sup> that lay at the basis of the strength of the European clubs.

In the light of mounting opposition among the Muslim population to an independent Lebanese state, Gemayel's concern for the territorial status quo was shared by several Maronite leaders. Arab nationalist declarations in favour of a reunification of Lebanon and Syria gave momentum to calls for concerted efforts on the Christian side. Support for a joined Christian formation was even voiced by the French High Commissioner. By late October 1936, initial steps for the formation of the Lebanese Phalangists had been initiated by a committee that was led by Naccache, Hélou, and Gemayel. On 8 November, less than a week before the ratification of the French–Lebanese agreement by the Lebanese parliament,

members of the new organization held a first formal meeting. The gathering was followed a week later by training exercises, which ended in violent clashes with Arab nationalist demonstrators, who had taken to the streets of Beirut in order to protest against the French–Lebanese treaty.<sup>30</sup>

The nomination of Gemayel as Supreme Leader of the organization – which was later turned into a lifetime position – granted new space for politics that were independent of existing Maronite networks. For the time being, Lebanese independence remained the core focus of the Phalangists' activities. While its public declarations also touched upon questions related to the socio-economic order, during the first years of its existence the organization lacked a comprehensive ideological message that would provide a broader political framework for its action.<sup>31</sup> Although membership remained nearly exclusively Christian, Gemayel's public statements focused on the organization's Lebanese character and identity. The political goal of Lebanese independence was understood as non-sectarian, potentially unifying Christian as well as Muslim supporters of Lebanese nationalism against a Muslim-dominated unionist movement that was seeking a reintegration of Lebanon into a Syrian state.<sup>32</sup> In this context, paramilitary training appeared as a prerequisite for the formation of a powerful youth organization that was able to defend the foundations of the nation.

The reality of Lebanese affairs during spring and summer 1937, confronting not only pro-Lebanese and unionist forces, but also those supporting a continuation of a French presence, with those seeking independence from both Syria and France, considerably altered the role of the Phalangists within the political battles. Ultimately, the changing context and the growing confrontation with the *Najjāda*, a Muslim youth organization whose origins echoed those of the Phalangists, led the authorities to turn their back on a formation that had increasingly departed from its commitment to pro-government politics and interests. On 18 November 1937, the Lebanese government decreed the dissolution of all paramilitary organizations including the Phalangists – a decision which further increased the tensions with the now illegal, but still active organization.

Politically, the growing independence of the Phalangists from mainstream Christian politics was noticeable. While the organization's non-sectarian Lebanese nationalist outlook was an important mobilizing force, its authoritarian structure with a Supreme Leader as the 'basis of legitimacy and legality'<sup>33</sup> had enlarged its popularity. With its estimated 22,000 members in 1939, the movement had gained a popular basis allowing for an active and visible participation in public political struggles.<sup>34</sup> In addition to regular parades and marches, the adoption of the Olympic salute and a uniform that echoed the style and colours of those of the Hitler Youth ensured a distinct appearance. As such, the organization was not a political party, but presented itself as an avant-garde for a non-partisan higher national goal.

Public perception, however, was not always favourable. The organization's authoritarian appearance had sparked considerable concern about fascist influences guiding its principles. Facing mounting criticism that was amplified by reports in local newspapers, Gemayel saw it as necessary to publicly refute any

such relations. Following an incident during which supporters of the Phalangists attacked a function of the Communist Party in Beirut, Gemayel declared:

Allow me to declare once and for all: neither do we belong to the fascists, nor are we tied to the communists. We are simply Lebanese in the broadest sense of the term and phenomenon, with all that this quality of being Lebanese implies about strength, nobility, and beauty.<sup>35</sup>

The cult of the Supreme Leader however, and the strict submission of the individual under the action and belief of the community continued to be perceived by many as an ideological equivalent to its paramilitary style. While its nationalist doctrine was neither expansionist nor ethnically exclusive, allusions to European fascist organizations remained a cause for concern.<sup>36</sup>

As in Syria, the popularity of paramilitary formations in Lebanon was not limited to either Christians or Muslims. Instead, the creation of the Muslim *Najjāda* in 1937 can be related to the same social and political conditions that had given rise to the Phalangists. Despite similarities in style and a mutual opposition to the French mandate, *Najjāda* and the Phalangists frequently clashed, verbally and physically, about questions related to Lebanese independence. Originating from within the Lebanese Muslim scout movement, the formation had turned to politics and nationalist action.<sup>37</sup> As with the Phalangists, who had recruited among students from Maronite schools, Muslim schools that were directed by the Maqāsid Islamic Charitable Association provided *Najjāda* a pool of potential members.<sup>38</sup> As a Muslim ‘twin’ to the Phalangists, as the organization was often described, *Najjāda* adopted a pan-Arab nationalist vision, calling for a suppression of all foreign influences.<sup>39</sup> The ambivalent relation of such pan-Arab concepts to ethnocentric and racial nationalism became visible in its slogan ‘Arabism above all’ (*al-ʿurūba fawqa al-jamīʿ*). This phrase, which also featured in the header of the newspaper *Bayrūt*, was obviously reminiscent of the German slogan ‘Germany above all’. In the case of *Najjāda*, however, it was not that the Arab people were to be above all others; instead, what was intended here was the supremacy of Arab loyalty to the nation over and above other loyalties to religion and class.<sup>40</sup>

Nevertheless, from an outside perspective, such allusions were an obvious cause for concern. In contrast to the political formations that had emerged in the last two decades, paramilitary youth organizations stood above personal and material interests of traditional political leaders. Such interests had in the past allowed for repeated manipulations according to French political directives. As highly organized actors that most forcefully reflected an increasing political participation of broader parts of society, organizations such as the Phalangists and the Iron Shirts posed an ever more direct threat to the traditional order. No less important, however, was its entailed vision of the individual, whose political standing and rights were bound to its membership in an organized body representing the interest and will of the community. Despite an evident lack of an elaborated and unified ideological vision, these organizations’ self-perception as the avant-garde of the nation echoed common nationalist discourses. The influence of fascism, in this

regard, had not led to ideal-typical fascist organizations. Symbolizing the changing order, these organizations nevertheless provided an outlet for a revolutionary impetus to overcome traditional society and to reshape community according to an authoritarian ideal. As such, paramilitary youth organizations influenced political discourses and contributed to public battles over political strategies, alliances, and orientations.

### **Nationalist struggles and the German option: Nazi Germany as friend and foe**

The formation of new political actors and the emergence of new social and political rifts in the local sphere catalysed German interests in the region. The crystallization of new political fronts alongside regional issues facilitated outside interferences and external use of local players. The shifting position of nationalist circles vis-à-vis France and the growing public concern about the developments in Palestine, Iraq and the Alexandretta-region provided possible starting-points for German lobbying in Lebanese and Syrian politics. German interventions, however, were not aimed at taking control of political actors, nor at questioning the existing political order; instead, they remained largely confined to rather symbolical support of individuals and groups in an attempt to advance general German interests and strategies. From the German side, the choice of contacts was hardly due to ideological considerations; the spectrum of interlocutors during the pre-war years ranged from Maronite to Sunni-Muslim, from Kurdish to Bedouin, from tribal chiefs and notables to fervent urban hot-heads. While nurturing Arab sympathies, substantial political interventions and an active dissemination of Nazi ideology were neither intended, nor practicable on the ground.

### ***Organizing pan-Arab opposition to French rule***

Throughout these years, Germany continued to be evoked as a potential option for support. In the light of the negotiations with France in spring and summer 1936, not all shared enthusiasm for the prospect of an agreement with the mandate power. Criticism of the National Bloc over negotiations and its willingness to compromise on the borders of the Syrian state had furthered pan-Arab opposition. The formation of the League of National Action in 1933 was an early indication of such confrontation, which had increasingly turned into a political conflict between two major nationalist movements. The creation of another relevant pan-Arab organization resulted from this split. Facing the risk of a mounting confrontation between the Bloc and the League, which would ultimately strengthen the French position, a handful of intellectuals and activists from Lebanon created an organization that would attempt to coordinate clandestinely the politics of major political actors. During the period between 1936 and 1939, members of this emerging Arab Nationalist Party (*al-ḥizb al-ʿarabī al-qawmī*) served as a primary channel for Arab–German encounters.

The Arab Nationalist Party was set up in Beirut in mid-1935.<sup>41</sup> With Qusṭanṭīn Zurayq, Fuād Khalīl Mufarraj, and the two brothers Kāzīm and Taqī al-Dīn al-Ṣulḥ as its main instigators, the core of this grouping was comprised of leading representatives of pan-Arab nationalist circles. Soon after its creation, the circle merged with a Damascene group that in various regards resembled both the concerns and ambitions of its Beirut twin. Despite its small size, the organization was well placed in the existing political, religious, and social criss-crossing, reaching out into various parts of the active nationalist spectrum. Following the principles laid down in its statute, the so-called ‘red book’, the organization’s strategy included the clandestine infiltration into active political and cultural bodies; its declared goal was to impose a covert radical pan-Arab superstructure on major actors. With branches in Palestine and Iraq, the organization aimed at coordinating and directing the broader nationalist struggle in the region.<sup>42</sup>

Ideologically, the ANP was calling for a non-Islamic nationalist understanding of Arab unity, challenging not only the increasingly popular currents of Phoenicianism and Lebanese Christian nationalism, but Islamic populism as well. Despite its elitist self-view as an avant-garde, its vision was not limited to immediate political struggles, but addressed society as such. Education, economy, family life, and morality were among those spheres that were perceived as crucial for the revival of the nation.<sup>43</sup> Hence, the forging of a military spirit amongst the youth appeared as crucial as the support of a village welfare service, orphanages, and the fight against illiteracy to rebuild the Arab nation.<sup>44</sup>

The organizational structure of the ANP reflected this approach. While the party itself remained clandestine, several newly founded groupings and institutions were turned into legal fronts, allowing for the promotion of the party’s views simultaneously in different contexts and, in fact, in different countries. No less important, however, was the active use of already existing organizations. Not only the Arab National Office for Research and Information in Damascus, but also the League of National Action, the Bloc’s National Youth, and even the Syrian Nationalist Party were infiltrated by members of the ANP. Youth organizations such as the Muslim Scouts in Lebanon and the Arab Scouts in Syria, but also cultural and political clubs such as the association *al-ʿUrwa al-Wuthqā* at the American University of Beirut and the Muthannā Club in Baghdad, included high-ranking figures that were affiliated to the ANP.<sup>45</sup> In addition to personalities such as Qusṭanṭīn Zurayq and Kāzīm al-Ṣulḥ, who were serving as the party’s President and Secretary General respectively, the covert coordination between representatives of major political players provided promising influence in the greater Arab political and intellectual sphere.

The reopening of the Arab Club (*al-Nādī al-ʿArabī*) in Damascus in early 1937 was an important part of these efforts. As its precursor, whose activities had catalysed nationalist resistance against the French during the 1920s, the club was intended to promote pan-Arab nationalist ideas and to initiate concerted nationalist action. With the election of Saʿīd Fattāḥ al-Imām as President and Munīr al-Rayyis as Secretary General, the ANP had placed two of its members at the club’s head.

For the development of German–Arab relations, the election of Imām proved important. Having spent parts of his studies in Germany, Imām held a medical degree from Berlin University. Back in Syria, in 1935–6, he had formed an association called the Alumni of German Universities and continued to maintain close contacts with the German consul in Beirut.<sup>46</sup> In late 1935, the German consulate had facilitated an invitation of Imām to a ‘Kraft durch Freude’ conference that was to convene in Berlin in July 1936 and made it possible to visit the Olympic Games that were to start a week later.<sup>47</sup> Similar contacts existed between Imām and the NSDAP/AO, whose Beirut branch served as a go-between for the Syrian alumni organization and the NSDAP in Berlin.<sup>48</sup> Since their inception, these relations between the alumni organization and the Arab Club on the one hand and German officials on the other had provoked sharp criticism not least in the local press, charging that these circles were in fact aiming to spread Nazi ideals and methods. Despite repeated denials, similar accusations continued to emerge during the following years.

For the time being, from a German perspective, such concerns were unfounded. In the light of continuing fears about potential conflicts with France and Britain, German interventions were much less explicit – though contacts to nationalist groupings nonetheless existed. Differing from Cairo, Baghdad and Jerusalem, German actions in Beirut remained largely confined to sporadic support offered by the consulate and limited relations of the local branch of the NSDAP/AO. Yet, local opponents as well as sympathizers of the German regime kept exaggerating the willingness of German officials to get involved.

National Socialist ideology nevertheless echoed in the actions of the German consulate and the local branch of the NSDAP/AO. Representatives of the party’s branch, for instance, collected information to ensure the matching of German economic activities with National Socialist doctrines. German officials thus scrutinized Lebanese and Syrian companies with regard to their ‘racial’ composition, and kept track of the press reporting about Germany. In case of a hostile coverage of German affairs in a specific newspaper, German companies were informed that the paper was to be excluded from the placing of German commercial ads.<sup>49</sup>

Despite the limitations of German involvement in local politics, the activities of the consulate and the German community in Beirut were followed with keen popular interest. Attention was best visible in the press coverage of the brief appearances of the German Economics Minister, Hjalmar Schacht, in Damascus in November 1936, and of Reich Youth Leader Baldur von Schirach in late November and early December 1937. While both visits hardly extended beyond stopovers on the way to Baghdad and Tehran, they were widely perceived as an effort to extend German influence in the region.<sup>50</sup> In the days following von Schirach’s visit, numerous articles went as far as depicting von Schirach’s mission as an attempt to set up National Socialist cells. Focusing on assumed meetings between von Schirach and leaders of the Damascene Arab Club, these articles asserted a German funding of the club that was to serve as a future base for National Socialist agents and propagandists; von Schirach’s stay supposedly marked the beginning of a covert German offensive in the region.<sup>51</sup>



Public declarations to the contrary, which were published by the head of the Arab Club in the local press,<sup>52</sup> hardly helped to counter these rumours that were expressed in local diplomatic circles as well.<sup>53</sup> Official British sources continued to claim that Germany had offered substantial aid to the Arab Club in an attempt to promote National Socialist thought. In contrast, the files of the German consulate suggest that these rumours only distantly reflected German activities on the ground, and were indeed part of a campaign led by British and French officials.<sup>54</sup> Although the consulate might have considered both high-level visits of leading German officials a welcome opportunity to trigger general interest for developments in Germany, the respective schedules of the visitors were explicitly limited to official encounters with French officials. In fact, according to the internal files of the German consulate, von Schirach had even turned down a request for a meeting by Fakhri Barūdī on behalf of the National Youth. Such meeting with a local nationalist personality, who had voiced interest in the youth organization in Germany, was deemed harmful to German–French relations.<sup>55</sup>

### *The general strike and French–Syrian negotiations*

While German efforts remained confined to a rather unsystematic struggle over the public image of the Nazi regime, the general strike in Syria in early 1936 and the developments in Palestine since summer that same year had shifted the strategic setting of Germany's political manoeuvring in the region. Among radical nationalist circles, which were increasingly sceptical about the prospects of any negotiated agreement with the mandate powers, the mounting conflicts in Syria and Palestine had further strengthened the belief that financial and material support from Germany offered an important factor for any successful revolt against the colonial powers.

Growing French repression and the closing of an office of the National Bloc in Aleppo in January 1936 had kicked off renewed confrontation. Different from most conflicts in the past, however, the events that were to develop in January and February not only highlighted the growing dissatisfaction of leading politicians and activists but also visibly echoed a deep frustration within the population. Over the next six weeks, a general strike in Syria shut down the country. While Syrian Christians had joined their Muslim compatriots, even Christian merchants in Beirut and in other parts of Lebanon expressed their solidarity by temporarily closing shops and local markets. In Damascus, but in other towns as well, popular anger over the political deadlock – the parliament was still closed and a resumption of treaty negotiations with France was not in sight – and the economic situation was voiced by the ulema, the local qabaḏāyāt, and by a broad spectrum of students and youth.<sup>56</sup> After considerable loss of human lives and only half-hearted offers for compromises by the French authorities, the strike had ultimately forced the High Commissioner into negotiations. For the moment, moderate nationalism represented by the dominant parts of the National Bloc had regained its role as a driving force within Syrian–French relations.

In addition to the activities of the strike that were directed against the French administration, public pressure had aimed for support in the international arena. A British report tellingly related the events as being ‘ostensibly against French misrule, but really part and parcel of general Arab-Islamic unrest’.<sup>57</sup> In this context, the German reaction was contrary to most expectations, and had in fact caused considerable dismay amongst nationalist circles. Based on information that was provided by the official German press agency Deutsches Nachrichten-Büro (DNB) in Jerusalem, several German news outlets had reported on the general strike, depicting it as the result of Soviet influences and actions. From an Arab perspective, such claims were an affront. In an editorial of the Damascene newspaper *al-Qabas*, editor Najīb al-Rayyis held the German Consul responsible for these ‘lies’. Writing in a commentary entitled ‘Love of the nation, not Bolshevism’, Rayyis asked:

How can he listen every evening to Berlin Radio, which is pronouncing these false claims, painting a true national affair in Bolshevik colours? How can he remain silent about such lies spread by the capital of his country?<sup>58</sup>

Referring to these charges in a report to the German foreign ministry, the consul expressed understanding for Rayyis’ anger. In a sharply worded letter, he openly criticized the coverage of the events by the DNB as baseless and against German interests.<sup>59</sup>

The German media’s misrepresentation of the strike, however, only added to another factor that would cause a temporary decline of German radiance in moderate nationalist circles: the prospect of an agreement with France over an end to the mandate. With its renewed standing, the National Bloc had managed to dominate the Syrian delegation to Paris. Throughout the negotiations, which had opened on 2 April and continued until mid-September, the National Bloc carefully avoided any irritations of the French side. With the left-wing Popular Front in power in Paris and tensions in Europe at a new height after the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, the German option had lost much of its appeal to these circles.

The conclusion of two separate treaties with Lebanon and Syria, which were ratified by the Lebanese and Syrian parliaments on 17 November and 27 December respectively, had furnished some optimism for a significant step towards independence. However, French reluctance to ratify the agreement with Syria raised fears about France’s readiness to submit to its regulations. Continuing uncertainties about France’s intentions and a further deterioration of the economic situation by late 1936 did nothing to prove that persisting fears among parts of the wider population were unfounded. Further stimuli for public discontent came from outside. Turkish propaganda in the disputed Sanjak of Alexandretta on the north-western Syrian border had reached a new level, while the French position remained suspiciously vague. Its ambivalent stance towards the Sanjak obviously reflected its desire not to alienate Turkey, keeping it out of a possible alliance with Italy and Germany.

***Echoes of the Palestinian revolt***

The growing tensions in Palestine were even more important. The mounting conflict with Britain and the Zionist movement was to occupy the region until the beginning of the Second World War. Traditional cultural, economic, and political ties were the basis for common perceptions of Palestine as an essential part of the Syrian lands. The mounting immigration of European Jews, the independence of Iraq and the prospect of negotiations in Syria and Lebanon had facilitated a Palestinian revolt that was soon to develop into an outright armed conflict. By April 1936, only weeks after the end of the general strike in Syria, popular unrest had shifted to Palestine.

In the neighbouring countries, the revolt was perceived as a crucial part of the contemporary pan-Arab struggle for independence.<sup>60</sup> From the beginning, Arab nationalists in Damascus and Beirut had closely followed the events, voicing support for the demands raised by the Palestinian-Arab population and vowing for a *jihād* against the colonial powers. Despite considerable fears of an economic and diplomatic backlash from the Palestinian upheaval to the territories under French mandate, popular sentiments found immediate expression in demonstrations and strikes. While the National Bloc remained bound by its fragile position towards France,<sup>61</sup> radical pan-Arab currents and emerging Islamic associations were less reluctant.<sup>62</sup> The creation of the Palestine Defence Committee (*lajnat al-difā' 'an filasṭīn*) in Damascus in 1936 reflected this mood of a pan-Arab duty towards Palestine and its Palestinian-Arab population. The Damascene committee included leading personalities of the local Arab nationalist movement, among them Nabīh al-ʿAẓma, Fakhār Barūdī and Fuad Khalīl Mufarrij. As its Secretary General, Mufarrij provided a direct link to the ANP, ensuring its influence and covertly linking the Committee's public agitation to the clandestine organization.<sup>63</sup>

The recommendations of the Peel Commission further popularized these activities. On 7 July 1937, the British commission, which had been delegated to Palestine in late December 1936 in an effort to determine a possible solution for the escalating conflict, had published its report. At its core lay the proposition of a termination of the British mandate over Palestine and the partition of the land into one Jewish and one Arab state. Pan-Arab nationalists reacted with outrage. Following a call by the Arab Higher Committee, the Palestine Defence Committee sponsored a pan-Arab conference that was held on 8–10 September 1937 in the Syrian town Bludan. With some 400 participants from Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Transjordan, Palestine, Egypt, Libya, and Saudi Arabia, the congress was a renewed confirmation of pan-Arab ambitions. While British and French pressure had ensured that no member of the Syrian government was present, various leading personalities not only from the League of National Action, but also from the National Bloc and its youth organizations participated, as did several Lebanese Arab nationalist Christians.<sup>64</sup> Highlighting the significance of the Palestinian question within nationalist and religious discourses, the focus of the debates and resolutions lay not so much on a critique of Britain, but on an objection to any compromise with Zionist aspirations in the region. Zionism and its assumed

destructive consequences for the traditional Arab social and economic order had shifted to the centre of pan-Arab agitation.<sup>65</sup>

The repercussion of the revolt noticeably aggravated the tensions between the Muslim and Christian populations on the one hand, and the local Jewish population on the other. Agitation against Jews increased considerably. A renewed campaign against 'Jewish products' had received popular support and had taken a more aggressive turn, with members of the National Bloc in Homs reportedly distributing signs amongst local merchants reading 'This shop does not sell Jewish goods'.<sup>66</sup> Incidents in which Jews were attacked for their assumed commercial relations with Zionist businesses in Palestine added to the fears of the Jewish community in Damascus.<sup>67</sup> Already in May 1936, the League of National Action had formulated a position that would further crystallize in the coming months. Leaflets that were distributed by the organization declared: 'Our party invites the people, who have already sacrificed a lot, to completely boycott Jewish goods. By this, they would have absolved a great part of their national duty.'<sup>68</sup>

The pan-Arab convention in Bludan added to this atmosphere. Given the ongoing debates about Jewish immigration from Europe, Palestine had turned in popular perception into a symbol of the conflicts with the colonial powers. The widespread desire for a concerted pan-Arab action against Zionism reverberated in publications and pamphlets distributed on the streets. On the eve of the conference in September 1937, a pamphlet that was addressed to the Lebanese public by the Palestinian Arab Higher Committee summarized this prevailing spirit. According to the pamphlet, a 'Jewish threat'<sup>69</sup> had emerged in the region with the immigration of 'arrogant' and 'impertinent' Jews – a specimen supposedly very different from the 'modest' and 'secluded' Oriental Jews known to the Arab world.<sup>70</sup> A destructive influence of immigrant Jews was said to have spread to all spheres of social life, including the spheres of trade, agriculture, and liberal professions; Jewish immigration had harmed the very foundations of society, its values, communal life, and social relations. 'In Palestine', the pamphlet warned, the Jews 'started penetrating as visitors and pilgrims, then they came as weak refugees, [only] to transform into explorers and colonizers.'<sup>71</sup>

The atmosphere that was enhanced by such polemics against an assumed 'Jewish threat' to society became visible in the reports of the French Sûreté Générale. In Aleppo, at the height of the Bludan conference, the agency reported that a local Jew had been knifed to death in a public market – the apprehended perpetrator explicitly justifying his deeds by claiming that the person under attack 'was a Jew and an infidel'.<sup>72</sup> The same day, unidentified persons, apparently targeting a brothel, had thrown a bomb in Aleppo.<sup>73</sup>

These were no individual acts; in the light of continuing attacks against local Jews, a telegram sent by Nabīh al-'Azma, head of the Palestine Defence Committee, to the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem was interpreted by the French authorities as a 'hardly covert threat of pogroms'<sup>74</sup> against the local Jewish communities. In his telegram, 'Azma had warned:

If you feel in sympathy with your nation, which is detested throughout the entire universe, then it would be your task to rescue at least the lives of those Jews

who are in Palestine or in one of the other Arab countries – and to take care that there is no opportunity for the disasters you are facing in the Occident to cross into the Orient.<sup>75</sup>

### *The German option and the Pan-Arab struggle*

Arab approaches to German representatives reflected the hope of profiting from a potential German conflict with Britain, and from Germany's expressed enmity towards the Jews. For the time being, however, it was not Germany but Italy that had adopted the role of a major public supporter of the Palestinian revolt.<sup>76</sup> Rumours of a direct Italian involvement in the events had circulated following the outbreak of the revolt, and French and British officials suspected various transfers of funds from Italian officials to local Arab leaders. Given the efforts by the Italian regime to improve its image in the Arab world, support for the Palestinian rebellion followed Italian strategic and propagandistic ambitions. As a confirmation of Mussolini's self-depiction as a 'protector of Islam', which he had again painted during a ceremony in Libya in March 1937, even the circulation of unproven rumours about an Italian involvement turned out to serve Italian interest.<sup>77</sup> However, in the light of a long-established public objection against Italian ambitions in the Mediterranean and frequent protests against the Italian occupation of Libya and Abyssinia, the ultimate success of these efforts to improve the Italian image remained limited. The German consulate noted not without satisfaction the sarcasm that was voiced in the local Arab press in reaction to Mussolini's depiction as a friend of Islam.<sup>78</sup> French authorities offered a similar assessment. In a letter to the French ambassador in Rome, the French foreign ministry pointed to the negative effects of assumed Italian–Palestinian links for the legitimacy of the Palestinian cause. According to this view, Italian interventions had encouraged international debates about a division of Palestine, and were thus increasingly seen with reservations even among Arab leaders.<sup>79</sup> Relations with the Italian regime had harmed Ḥusaynī's 'moral authority'<sup>80</sup> and the legitimacy of his politics.

Yet, suspicions of ties with the Italian regime persisted with regard to the Syrian Nationalist Party. Following the arrest of several of its members in late 1935, the subsequent trial ended on 28 January 1936, sending Sa'āda to prison. Despite the formal dissolution of the party, the verdict did not curb its activities. According to investigations by French authorities, Shakīb Arslān who had reportedly used his reputation amongst the Druze population in support of the SNP encouraged the activities of the party.<sup>81</sup> In the light of the ideological and strategic differences separating the SNP from Arslān, the assumption of an Italian connection bridging these gaps was deemed the most probable. In addition, French authorities noticed with concern an increasing number of references to the SNP that had been broadcast on Italian Radio Bari.<sup>82</sup> Notwithstanding such indications, the authorities were unable to present documents that would irrefutably discredit the organization.<sup>83</sup>

In the public eye, contacts with Germany appeared far less compromising. From an Arab nationalist perspective, the creation of a Jewish state posed not only a serious challenge to the Arab nation, but to National Socialist Germany as

well. In a lengthy letter that was addressed to an official of the Orient department of the German *Auswärtige Amt*, the Lebanese-born pan-Arab nationalist 'Ādil Arslān – a brother of Shakīb Arslān – explicitly drew attention to the challenges entailed in the recommendations of the Peel Commission.<sup>84</sup> As a detailed argument formulated by a highly knowledgeable activist of pan-Arab affiliation, the letter exemplified the German option in Arab nationalist considerations. Writing in August 1937, Arslān explained:

The question of an independent Jewish state in Palestine should be considered as the most alarming challenge of our time, as an event whose consequences are unpredictable. ... The real revenge of the Jews against Germany will only take place once most of the German Jews have already left your country. Today, Jewry [la Juiverie] is anxious about them. If you were to let these precious hostages go, the rancour entertained by this race would then manifest its effect. I know that the Zionists do not need your Jews for their 'Republic' and that those [Jews] from Poland and Romania are ready to go there [to Palestine], but I am sure that – for German interests – it would be better to keep your Jews, and to keep them under surveillance. The intrigue is vast and well organized. ... I do not have to tell you that our common interests oblige us to pursue a strict policy; both sides, the German as well as the Arab one, must collaborate in a serious manner in an attempt to foil the project of a Jewish state in Palestine. ... I would therefore ask you to undertake the necessary steps so that his Excellency, your minister, will be aware of our concerns and that the government of the Reich knows that all Arabs and Muslims consider this question of greatest importance. All their sympathies will naturally be with the power that will have assisted them.<sup>85</sup>

Similarly to his brother, 'Ādil Arslān stood for the interconnection of Arab affairs and their close relations with the evolving events in Europe. At the time of writing, he had temporarily adopted the presidency of the Syrian–Palestinian delegation in Geneva, thus being ever more involved in international debates about the various Arab struggles. Despite his friendly relations with German officials, which went back to the times of King Faisal in 1920 and which had further intensified during his times in exile in Iraq,<sup>86</sup> Arslān's sympathies for European powers were ultimately linked to these powers' support for the Arab cause. While Nazism was an option, it was German policy towards the Arab world that would determine any forging of relations.

Important in this context were Arslān's positions towards Jews and German anti-Semitic policies. Arslān entertained a deep mistrust of Zionism – and of Jews in general. His assumption of a Jewish plot for the obstruction of Arab unity openly reflected profound resentments that were directed not only against Zionist leaders and their policies, but against German and European Jews as such.<sup>87</sup> His perception of Jews as representing the mounting challenge of communism matched views that lay at the core of the National Socialist world view, fusing both his anti-communist and anti-Semitic premises. Yet, in contrast to most nationalist leaders, Arslān was concerned about the immediate impact of German anti-Jewish

persecutions for the situation in Palestine; in his view, the persecutions of Jews in Germany would promote immigration and ultimately threaten the Arab world.<sup>88</sup>

In this regard, other nationalists showed far fewer reservations.<sup>89</sup> A first request for material support on behalf of the Arab nationalist struggle in Palestine was addressed to Fritz Grobba, the head of the German Legation in Baghdad, in December 1936. Fawzī al-Qawuqjī, a former member of King Faysal's Arab Army, who was widely recognized for his participation in the Syrian Revolt in 1926 and who had later fled to Iraq, approached Grobba in an attempt to negotiate a possible supply of weapons by the German regime.<sup>90</sup> Following his return from Palestine, where for several weeks he had led the rebellion with a number of volunteers from Iraq and Syria, Qawuqjī provided Grobba with a detailed assessment of the ongoing confrontations. Yet despite Grobba's insistence on Germany's sympathies for the Arab struggle, the reluctance of the Auswärtige Amt to confront British positions brought these rapprochements to a dead end.<sup>91</sup>

Notwithstanding such frustrations, the Peel Commission's recommendations for the creation of a Jewish state and pan-Arab activism in the wake of the Bludan conference provided renewed optimism for Arab–German cooperation. While a delegation of Syrian nationalists to the German Consul General in Beirut in September 1937 was turned away,<sup>92</sup> a concerted effort initiated by members of the ANP was deemed more successful. In December 1937, the head of the Damascene Arab Club, Sa'īd Fattāḥ al-Imām, visited Berlin in a renewed attempt to negotiate substantial support for the Arab nationalist struggle. Imām's continuing relations with the German consulate and with representatives of the NSDAP/AO in Beirut had made him a first choice for any contacts with Berlin. Acting on behalf of Amīn al-Ḥusaynī, the Arab Club, and the Arab National Office for Research and Information, Imām submitted a detailed proposal for cooperation that was meant to coordinate mutual activities and relations.<sup>93</sup> The plan included specific German obligations to provide material and non-material support for the Arab nationalist movement. In exchange, the Arab contracting partners would engage to

- a) promote German trade in the Arab-Islamic world;
- b) build a pro-German atmosphere that would prove helpful in times of war;
- c) promote National Socialist thought in the Arab-Islamic world;
- d) fight Communism by all possible means;
- e) boycott all Jewish goods;
- f) continue terrorist acts in all French colonial and mandated territories populated by Arabs and Muslims;
- g) fight against the creation of a Jewish state; and
- h) spread German education in the Arab-Islamic world.

Finally, in case of its success, the Arab side promised to rely on German capital and on German 'spiritual powers' alone.<sup>94</sup>

As a first substantial offer for German–Arab cooperation, this proposal differed from previous approaches to the German regime; not demands for weapons or funds, but a broader outline of mutual interests was put forward. While no

documents are available to assess German reactions, according to all evidence the deal failed, though the reason remains unclear. In a study about German relations to Arab nationalists in Palestine, 'Abd al-Rahmān 'Abd al-Ghanī draws attention to general considerations on the German side. According to his assessment, with Germany negotiating at the time with Great Britain over its claim in Czechoslovakia, Imām's proposal threatened to provoke British objections.<sup>95</sup> Rather different, then, are the accounts of contemporaries that were involved in this German–Arab encounter. According to the memoirs of Munīr al-Rayyis, at the time a leading activist of the ANP who was closely implicated in the plan, an agreement had actually been reached, apparently envisaging the immediate supply of weapons. The delivery of these weapons only failed when Ḥusaynī delegated a second person to travel to Berlin, raising suspicions amongst German officials about the trustworthiness of Imām.<sup>96</sup> Qawuqjī confirms this assessment: similarly to Rayyis, Qawuqjī depicts the dispatch of a second delegate in the name of Ḥusaynī as the ultimate reason for Germany distancing itself from Imām's offer.<sup>97</sup>

The importance of these negotiations in late 1937 thus did not lie in their outcome. According to Grobba, in the years preceding the Second World War, German material support to the nationalist cause in the region was limited to sporadic and unsystematic supply of weapons and funds to Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian nationalists.<sup>98</sup> These were rather symbolic gestures that were based on German efforts not to distract Arab sympathies any further; they did not even remotely match expectations on the Arab side. The proposal for cooperation that was offered by Imām widely exceeded the existing relations on the ground. Its explicit allusions to the Nazi regime as an ideological reference outlined a comprehensive political vision entertained in these radical pan-Arab circles.

The apparent ignorance of the German consulate of such profound ambitions entertained by the Arab Club is striking. German officials in Beirut in fact appeared unaware of the seriousness with which these activists insisted on an explicit German–Arab partnership. While Imām's relations to German officials in Beirut had frequently triggered public campaigns against the Arab Club, the sporadic notes of the German consulate reveal clumsy reactions to these charges.<sup>99</sup> Overwhelmed by the gravity of the accusations, the consulate ultimately tried to trace its origins. Two years after the reopening of the Arab Club, the consulate thus scrutinized the club's official statute in an attempt to identify ideological references to Nazism that would justify French and British concerns. It concluded that according to the available information 'no reference to National Socialist teaching or other principles that would suggest any links to Germany'<sup>100</sup> could be made out.

### *Mediterranean struggles and the revision of Versailles*

German diplomats in Beirut remained reluctant to encourage any substantial Arab–German rapprochement. In part, these reservations reflected the changing alliances and the frequent strategic shifts of local nationalist currents that were best illustrated in the manoeuvres pursued by Shakīb Arslān. Despite his long-standing relations with German officials, his activities remained unsteady towards



most European powers, rendering an assessment of his loyalties and convictions nearly impossible.

In a brief reference to Shakiḥ's strategy, his brother 'Ādil Arslān highlighted the different points of view of how to engage the European powers in the struggle for independence, reflecting not only the dissonances in the personal relations between the two brothers, but also in a much deeper sense amongst the various Arab nationalist currents:

The Arab nation needs the help of a great European state, or better: the help of [several European] states. My brother sees it as his duty to strive for this aid. We are brothers, but we differ a lot with regard to politics. He hastens and has no patience with things that came to his mind. In my opinion, the belief in the usefulness of [outside] help, which is not made public, is a mistake.<sup>101</sup>

'Ādil's critique of Shakiḥ was shared by many; yet, no other activist during these years could claim a similar flood of public declarations, analyses and reports about contemporary Arab affairs as the editor of the pan-Arab journal *La Nation Arabe*. The guiding principles of most of his actions, Arslān could justly assert, were detailed in his writings for his Geneva-based magazine. While his relations with European powers had indeed shifted on various occasions, these shifts, for him, were functions of promises and disappointments. His positioning during the Spanish Civil War was one of these manoeuvres, which from an outside perspective could be deemed as proof for his unstable and disloyal character. In 1936, the formation of leftist Popular Fronts in Spain and France had given rise to hopes for independence amongst nationalist movements in the Spanish- and French-controlled regions of North Africa. In the absence of any serious steps taken by the new governments to fulfil these expectations, frustration soon reached a new high. The mounting conflict between General Franco and the leftist government in Madrid thus provided a new option: the withdrawal of Arab support from the Popular Front in favour of a newly emerging power that was seemingly willing to grant autonomy in the near future.<sup>102</sup>

According to Arslān, ideology was no factor whatsoever in such manoeuvring. In an article that was published in *La Nation Arabe*, he outlined the logic of the strategic gamble that he himself had much inspired. Writing about the civil war in Spain, Arslān declared that

we are neither on the right, nor on the left. We are neither for nor against the government, we are neither for nor against General Franco. We are simply and exclusively for that party that will recognize the right to independence enjoyed by the population of the Riff.<sup>103</sup>

In 1938, the number of Moroccans participating in the war against the Spanish Republic had reached 70,000. While many had joined Franco's troops under economic hardship and threats of punishment, the discursive mixture of promises of independence and calls for a struggle against the infidel government of the Spanish

Popular Front had convinced others.<sup>104</sup> From Arslān's perspective, the importance of the Spanish Civil War did not lie in its confrontation between democracy and fascism, but in its impacts on Arab independence.

For French officials, but no less so for their German counterparts, such a position remained suspect.<sup>105</sup> Arslān's engagement with Germany had covered nearly two decades, and was not confined to immediate struggles for independence and against specific colonial powers. His apologetic comments about the annexation of Austria within the German Reich were a case in point.<sup>106</sup> French authorities also noted Arslān's writings, which they regarded as reflecting National Socialist ideas.<sup>107</sup> Added to this was Arslān's public appearance at an official function organized by the Arab Club in Berlin.<sup>108</sup> As an institution that was mainly engaged in cultural affairs and that was joined by several Arab nationalist students in Germany, the club was seen as being directly related to its Damascene namesake and the Muthannā Club in Baghdad.

The Spanish Civil War had a resounding impact on the broader public. Already in 1936, the prominent Lebanese politician Riyād al-Ṣulḥ, whom the French authorities suspected of receiving financial support from Italy, had called on the Moroccan population to remain neutral in the evolving conflict over Spain.<sup>109</sup> This call, however, remained exceptional.<sup>110</sup> In the context of the treaty negotiation with France, such declarations were meant to facilitate a French compromise over Lebanese and Syrian independence.

The French authorities in Beirut keenly followed local perceptions of German ambitions in central Europe, as they promised to offer an insight into shifting loyalties in the conflicts with French positions on the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean. In this context, articles that were published in French language newspapers in Beirut during spring 1938 indicate a French-sponsored campaign against mounting German propaganda in the Middle East.<sup>111</sup> German revisionist policies towards Poland, Austria, and Czechoslovakia provided opportunities to highlight the aggressive territorial ambitions pursued by the German regime; these ambitions allowed for questioning of the popular image of Germany as a power striving for a just revision of the territorial order laid out at Versailles. Yet, despite such efforts by the French authorities, it was difficult to achieve any substantial gain. Even following the Munich agreement in late September 1938, Arab newspapers openly voiced support for German declarations on Mediterranean issues.

French policies towards the Sanjak of Alexandretta further complicated the attempts to enhance France's image and to strengthen its public position vis-à-vis German pro-Arab overtures. While the Lebanese government had declared its loyalty towards France on the eve of the conference in Munich, sympathies among Arab nationalists had reached a new low over French submission to Turkish pressure. The Syrian conflict with Turkey about the status of this region had its origins in the peculiar mixture of the Sanjak's population. As one of the Levantine regions whose borders were redrawn after the break-up of the Ottoman Empire, the problem of the Sanjak had soon turned into a focal point of the emerging conflicts related to the various multi-ethnic and multi-confessional territories of the Arab Middle East. Given the high percentage of the Turkish population in the

region and the strong traditional bounds to the Turkish side of the border, Turkish claims were manifested early on. Vehement opposition against any such ambition was not only due to strong Arab nationalist currents amongst the Sanjak's Arab population, but was as well based on the economical relevance of the region for the Aleppine hinterland.

In the wake of the Munich conference, French submission to Turkish territorial demands confirmed the worst expectations about the readiness of European powers to compromise over the territorial integrity of small and weak nations.<sup>112</sup> Independence and unity of countries under mandate, as much as the sovereignty of small nations in central Europe, were perceived as being subject to French and British bargaining over their positions vis-à-vis Germany.

### *Forging antifascist alliances on the eve of war*

In the years preceding the Second World War, no political current in Syria and Lebanon could avoid closely following the evolving events in Europe and the Mediterranean. Strategic and ideological reasoning as much as ethnic and religious affiliations had drawn most political actors in the Levant into the regional arena; in many cases, local politics entailed an explicit international message. In this regard, the situation of the Syrian–Lebanese Communist Party was no exception. Since its formation in the mid-1920s, its politics and ideological concerns were bound to wider international considerations. International alliances, for this spectrum, were not only strategically necessary, but reflected an ideologically based association in a universally shared struggle against the existing order. The Communist reaction to the Spanish Civil War mirrored this orientation. In a monograph entitled *The Arabs and the Civil War in Spain*, which was authored by Khālid Bakdāsh, the Secretary General of the Communist Party, a detailed interpretation was provided of the evolving conflict between European fascist and democratic regimes and its relevance for the Arab world.<sup>113</sup>

In summer 1936, Bakdāsh had joined the Syrian delegation to Paris in an apparent effort to advance the negotiations through his contacts with the French CP. The successful conclusion of the negotiations was interpreted as a major success against both fascism and imperialist rule. Yet, the struggle was far from over, and the defence of the treaties remained a priority of communist politics. This goal implied calls to 'purify' the French administration from reactionary elements: in the light of strong tendencies within the mandate authorities that were opposed to the Popular Front, the Syrian CP vehemently accused these elements of supporting and spreading fascist propaganda in the mandated territories.<sup>114</sup>

The mounting opposition within French political circles to the ratification of the French–Syrian treaty and France's submission to Turkish claims in the Sanjak of Alexandretta heightened these concerns. The resignation of the Blum government in June 1937 and the ensuing deterioration of French–Syrian relations gave additional importance to the struggle over French public opinion. Instead of opting for open conflict, the Syrian CP continued to support the National Bloc and its

moderate allies in their efforts to preserve the achieved Syrian–French relations and to keep the door open for future settlements with France.

Such politics had allowed for a noticeable improvement in the communist position in local political battles. Reflecting the significant rise in the number of party members – from only a few hundred in 1933 to over 3,500 in 1939<sup>115</sup> – the CP had established itself as an influential political player. In addition to public events and demonstrations, the creation of the monthly cultural magazine *al-Ṭalīʿa* had further facilitated the party's outreach into socialist and liberal nationalist spectra. The licensing of the daily *Ṣawt al-Shaʿb* in May 1937 finally allowed for regular interventions into broader public debates.<sup>116</sup> While the party remained excluded from the Bludan congress in September 1937, its developing nationalist rhetoric paved the way for personal relations with leading representatives of Lebanese and Syrian nationalist currents.<sup>117</sup> The party's positions towards Zionism and the Palestinian question were particularly helpful in this regard. While the CP had repeatedly drawn attention to the fact that any support for Nazism in Germany would ultimately aggravate the situation in Palestine, on other occasions the party had joined mainstream nationalist anti-Zionist protests and positions.<sup>118</sup>

The increased popularity of the Syrian–Lebanese CP was also visible in terms of the support gathered for its antifascist activities. Since the early 1930s, communists had endeavoured to attract public attention for the mounting influence of German and Italian propaganda and to organize opposition to the threat that it posed to the Middle East. The creation of the League against Nazism and Fascism in Syria and Lebanon, whose earliest traces went back to 1935, was related to these efforts. Yet, despite its close ties with the CP, the League was no simple outlet of the party and its Comintern-guided politics; instead, it represented a broader Marxist and liberal–progressive spectrum of intellectuals and political activists.<sup>119</sup> In the light of continuing hopes placed on France and, by now, the obvious challenge of fascism, larger numbers of the public voiced interest in the League's activities.

France's decision not to ratify the French–Syrian agreement in late 1938 disappointed even some of her staunchest allies among Syrian nationalists. Yet, for the time being, France – besides Soviet Russia – persisted in its status as the only viable option for the communist movement. Even in the wake of violent clashes with the French army in March 1939, the Communist Party continued to express its desire to forge an alliance between the Syrian and French people.<sup>120</sup> Not France as such, but reactionary forces that were increasingly dominating its politics, economy, and press were held responsible for the failure of a still possible alliance between the two countries.

As late as May 1939, Beirut witnessed one of the most outstanding public statements against Fascism and Nazism and in support of European democratic forces in the pre-war years. The 1st Syrian–Lebanese Conference against Fascism that was organized by the League against Nazism and Fascism in Syria and Lebanon on 6–7 May 1939 successfully highlighted a prevailing mood of French–Syrian and French–Lebanese partnership. With over 200 participants, the congress had attracted support from dozens of organizations and various members of parliament.<sup>121</sup> In addition to speakers from different political spectra, numerous letters

sent by high-ranking Syrian and Lebanese politicians in support of the gathering underlined the importance of the event.<sup>122</sup>

The two-day conference included numerous speeches. Bringing together reputed intellectuals, the conference displayed profound knowledge of the ideological and political specificities of the German and Italian regimes. In the talks and speeches that were delivered at the gathering in the Orient Club, fascism was depicted as an all-encompassing threat. Topics on the agenda included ‘Fascism and Arab culture’ (Rajā Ḥūrānī), ‘Fascism is the enemy of the woman’ (Maqbūla al-Shalq), ‘Fascism and the Arab peoples’ (Khālīd Bakdāsh), ‘Fascism is the murder of thought’ (Iliyās Abū Shabka), and ‘The truth about Fascism’ (Tawfīq Yūsuf ‘Awwād).<sup>123</sup> On behalf of the preparatory committee of the conference, the Lebanese intellectual and activist Ra’f Khūrī had outlined the context of the meeting, and the urgency of a united stand. Although strongly influenced by Marxism, Khūrī himself had not joined the Communist Party – though he contributed significantly to the activities of the League and the growing public attention it had gained. While his introductory talk highlighted the need for local action, it also provided a detailed analysis of society under fascist rule. Addressing the audience, Khūrī declared:

This conference shows that the resistance against fascism here [in Lebanon and Syria] is no longer limited to followers of this or that conviction; this resistance is increasingly encompassing the people as a whole. This is due to the fact that fascism is not an enemy of a [particular] group within the people, but it is the enemy of the people as a whole. ... Our relations with the democratic states were no love affair; but whatever our problem with these countries, we do not want Fascism to intervene in our affairs, letting its imperialist claws dig themselves into our region.<sup>124</sup>

Within these circles, the democratic option continued to reverberate as a plausible political ideal; yet, the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939 ultimately challenged this position. While antifascist circles had argued in favour of democratic rule as an essential step in their fight for socialism and communism, the shift of Stalin’s Soviet Russia placed such convictions in question. In addition, the suppression of political life by French authorities since summer 1939 and the mounting repressions against most political movements increasingly undermined any talk of democratic rule.

For pan-Arab nationalist currents, as represented by the Arslān brothers and the ANP, the latest events only confirmed their position vis-à-vis France and its democratic allies. With regard to their struggle for independence, Germany’s nationalist and authoritarian outlook was not necessarily a drawback, but in many respects provided the German regime with an additional attraction. While the Arab Club had explicitly linked its pro-German overtures to the National Socialist ideology, others remained fascinated by Germany’s successful struggle against the ‘chains of Versailles’ – and continued to entertain vague hopes for German material aid in the various local struggles.

## **Echoes of Nazism in intellectual discourses: community, revival, and the enemies of the nation**

Traces of National Socialist politics and fascination for the successes of the German regime were not only discernible in formations of the youth or in organizational contacts and links to German officials. Facets of National Socialist thought increasingly echoed in intellectual debates as well. Monographs and numerous magazines offer an insight into elaborated reconstructions and often critical assessments of contemporary German thought. In this context, the writings of widely read thinkers ever more impacted on the political scenery of the time. Magazines such as *al-Ḥadīth*, *al-ʿIrfān*, and *al-Tamaddun al-Islāmī* – which were often closely related to activist cultural circles and clubs – aimed at a direct intervention in society.

### ***National education and the philosophy of the nation***

The renaissance of the nation lay at the core of Arab philosophical thought. Since the early 1930s, the quest for philosophical foundations of an Arab revival had become ever more pressing. The Damascene magazine *Majallat al-Muʿallimīn w-al-Muʿallimāt* which was co-edited by the renowned intellectuals Jamīl Ṣalībā and Kāmil ʿAyyād, illustrated the openness for outside inspiration. Being dedicated to the development of national education, the magazine offered comparative approaches on questions of teaching, socialization, and methods of instruction. In late 1935, the magazine published an article that explicitly drew on the experience of other nations' revival. In this context, Germany was named as one:

The revolution of the German people only came about with the help of the iron youth; the revolution is the result of the alarm of the German youth and its distress following the world war, its suffering of the pains of unemployment and the bitterness of poverty. This revolution is not restricted to a liberation from foreign treaties and bounds, but compounds of an inner revolution aiming at ending the past age and following new ways of life.<sup>125</sup>

The image of an 'inner revolution' that was to be inspired in the hearts of the next generation reflected a prevailing mood of a steady decline of society; change was not about reform, but about a revolution of values and traditions, about the creation of 'new ways of life'. Articles continued to be published on the Hitler Youth and its role and links within German society;<sup>126</sup> interest, however, had become much broader, addressing the very educational reasoning of paramilitary organizations and the role of the youth – these 'soldiers of war and guardians of peace'<sup>127</sup> – within a nation's struggle for revival.

Introducing one of the various contemporary publications dealing with educational questions, Munīr al-Nuṣūlī, the son of the eminent leader of the Lebanese scouts movement, Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Nuṣūlī, declared 'the best service for man to

serve his nation [*umma*] is his sympathy for its children, and to strive for sincere national education.<sup>128</sup> In a chapter dedicated to the links between education and politics, Nuṣūlī wrote:

It is necessary that the government has goals, which it is striving for with wise determination. The President has the first responsibility to ensure the implementation of the curriculum on all levels. He must be an honest inspector of this nation from whose midst he was chosen. ... In this book, we will not go deeper into this issue, we will only focus on its educational side – a side which we consider of highest importance for society. Aren't the modern nations that had recently experienced a renaissance – Italy, Germany, and Turkey – a confirmation of what we have just said?<sup>129</sup>

While the bearer of change was the youth, it was the nation and its 'honest inspector' that were to supervise its education. National education as a key to national revival required new organizations and new educational patterns; yet, in the first place, it was meant to foster a philosophy of the nation that would re-introduce glorious national traditions, values, and myths into the minds and souls of its children.<sup>130</sup>

In this context, foreign education was the exact opposite of their aspirations. Despite the popularity of missionary schools, of the American University of Beirut and the Université Saint Joseph, according to this view their curricula obstructed any true national upbringing. 'The foreign teacher is the stumbling stone on the way to independence',<sup>131</sup> Nuṣūlī had pointedly concluded. This perception implied demands for a national education that would not be limited to the elites, but would be directed to an entire generation, serving as the nation's body in the future. While education had for a long time been confined to urban and elitist sectors of society, education was more and more seen as a necessity for the population as a whole.

Quṣṭanṭīn Zurayq, an emerging icon of pan-Arab nationalist thought, shared this view. His position as a teacher at the American University of Beirut, his presidency over the Arab Nationalist Party and his influential role in the cultural club *al-'Urwa al-Wuthqā* gave him a distinguished voice. National education, for him, 'produces the awareness of the individual that he is a living part of the body of the nation. This awareness pushes him to fulfil his duty towards his nation in its most complete form.'<sup>132</sup> Related to this 'awareness' of one's belonging to the nation was the search for a national philosophy that was to provide mutual links between the members of the nation. The concept of an authentic culture provided a possible answer. A frequent occurrence were articles that tended to determine shared cultural foundations and to identify their traces in contemporary Levantine societies. Reflecting the fragmented state of society, its assumed glorious past, and its desired future, numerous authors scrutinized Arab history for answers.<sup>133</sup>

Anthropological theories were increasingly quoted to legitimize ideological claims.<sup>134</sup> In addition to reflections about history and culture, questions about the origin of man and assumed diversification in racial and ethnic communities

emerged in debates about the foundations of the Arab nation. The interest reflected in contemporary Syrian and Lebanese writings for Europe and for European *fin-de-siècle* thinkers is striking.<sup>135</sup> In the years preceding the Second World War, intellectuals increasingly turned to the works of authors such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Gustave Le Bon, and Victor Hugo. Nietzsche's concept of an *Übermensch*, for instance, lay at the core of several articles that featured in the recently founded cultural weekly magazine *al-Amālī*.<sup>136</sup> Interest was further promoted by an Arab translation of Nietzsche's *Thus spoke Zarathustra* that was published by Filīks Fāris in 1938;<sup>137</sup> recent reinterpretations of Nietzsche's 'philosophy of power'<sup>138</sup> among intellectuals in Europe echoed in local intellectual debates as well.<sup>139</sup> In addition, Nietzsche's critique of the state of morality in European societies provided answers that were considered relevant for the Arab context.<sup>140</sup>

The journal *al-Amālī* was a prominent outlet for these reflections. The journal was edited by 'Umar Farrūkh, who had studied in Leipzig during the mid-1930s. His esteem for German Romantic thought was not limited to nineteenth-century thinkers, but extended to its *völkisch* expressions of the twentieth century as well. In a series of articles devoted to the *Deutsche Glaubensbewegung*, the 'movement of German faith', Farrūkh discussed the widespread assumption of a secular core of National Socialist thought. Focusing on the *völkisch* movement led by Alfred Rosenberg, Farrūkh tried to trace the origins of a 'German faith'. Going back to Meister Eckhart and the Christian reformer Martin Luther, Farrūkh saw the movement as a spiritual revival of the German *Volk*.<sup>141</sup> Nietzsche, here again, was perceived as essential. As the founder of the movement in its contemporary form Farrūkh argued, Nietzsche 'did believe in nothing other than something that was emanating from the spirit of the people and that was practised by the people',<sup>142</sup> that was adding to its spiritual power. The movement now longed to reform German society according to its authentic spiritual essence:

The Germans wish to free themselves in their faith from all foreign chains which do not fit to their philosophy and to their ways of thinking, which do not suit their highest ideals they want to live for. For that reason they found themselves a philosophical current which they called: movement of German faith.<sup>143</sup>

### ***The foundations of the nation***

The second half of the 1930s witnessed a significant development of the theoretical elaborations of Arab nationalist thought. In various respects, nationalist thinkers had promoted the sophistication of their concepts that had gradually taken root in the diverse nationalist currents. In the Syrian and Lebanese context, monographs contributed by Edmond Rabbath, Anṭūn Sa'āda, and Qusṭanṭīn Zurayq were dedicated to the question of national identity and the origin of the nation.<sup>144</sup> Many of these works offer an insight into contemporary perceptions of Romantic German and National Socialist nationalist thought.

Racial theories, as formulated by Arthur de Gobineau and Houston Stewart Chamberlain, and elaborated by National Socialist ideologists, hardly reverberated in Arab nationalist discourses in their original forms; the premises of these



theories were generally rejected. Yet, such objections were often a matter of definition, rather than of principle. In fact, an ideal-typical antagonism between ‘ethnos’ and ‘demos’, which juxtaposed a French republican understanding of the nation as a community of choice with a German biologicistic concept of a natural *Volk*, rarely echoed in Arab nationalist discourses. While biological concepts of a distinct and pure communal entity appeared scientifically questionable, definitions of community that were based on supra-historical traits nevertheless allowed for a quasi-natural determination of communal boundaries.

The theories of the French medical doctor and social psychologist Gustave Le Bon, who had attracted much favourable attention for his positive depiction of Arab civilization, figured as a prominent point of reference for these concepts. Yet, his views did not remain unchallenged. In an outstanding critique of Le Bon’s writings, Maḥmūd al-Manjūrī vehemently questioned Le Bon’s culturalized perceptions of community. Le Bon’s assertion of historically formed mental differences between the peoples, which he held responsible for the different grades of civilization, went contrary to Manjūrī’s conviction. While Le Bon had modified racial theories, his premise of historically formed races reflected a cultural determinism that resembled the concept of distinct communities that was forwarded by biologist racial thought. In contrast, for Manjūrī, differences between the peoples were social; while the physical appearance might vary, the human psyche was one. ‘Isn’t the human being a human being in the first place?’,<sup>145</sup> Manjūrī had asked rhetorically. In his view, inequalities between the peoples were no justification for colonial ambitions; instead, they were an appeal to reason and to the political will to do justice.

Anṭūn Sa’āda’s elaborations about ‘race’ and ‘nation’ were important contributions to the ongoing debates. Already in his early writings, Sa’āda had discussed questions related to the origin of nations, and had attempted to determine their characteristic traits. His work *The Evolution of Nations*, which was to a large part written during his prison term in 1936, provided an detailed explanation of his thoughts. In his introduction, Sa’āda highlighted the relevance of the nation for the individual and its relevance for the well-being of humankind.<sup>146</sup> Sa’āda’s claim of a distinct Syrian nation clearly differed from other communal conceptions of the time that were based either on Arab or Lebanese particularities, or on Christian or pan-Islamic loyalties.

For Sa’āda, modern science had proved that the belief in racial purity of nations was untenable. Referring to the work *Race and Civilization. A Critical Examination of Racial Theories*, written by the Austrian economist Friedrich Hertz, Sa’āda questioned a core aspect of German racial thought. Yet, while acknowledging that no nation could be ‘pure’ in a racial sense, Sa’āda’s theories are strikingly reminiscent of Le Bon’s concept of ‘historical races’.<sup>147</sup>

According to Sa’āda, nations were indeed composed of a variety of different racial groups: “[T]he nation is a mixture of different human races [*sulālāt bashriyya*].”<sup>148</sup> Thus, not purity but distinctiveness lay at the core of his nationalist concept:

[T]he nation is a group of people living a life with shared interests, with a shared destiny and shared mental-material constituents in a defined area of land from which it has – over the path of history – attained particular traits and characteristics that distinguishes this group from others.<sup>149</sup>

Following this assumption, the Syrian nation had come into being long before the Arab conquest of the Syrian lands, precluding any productive Arab cultural influences in the formation process of this nation.<sup>150</sup> While the genius and the message of the Syrian nation was a result of its particular historical racial constitution in ancient history, recent influences from outside were not seen as prolific, but as corrupting and undermining its very essence. In this respect, Sa'āda's claim of a Syrian distinctiveness that derived from particular geographical and spiritual conditions only varied the assumed origins of national characteristics. Not biology, but early history served as the basis determining today's national composition and the deriving distinct message of the nation.<sup>151</sup>

Sa'āda's objection to Zionism and Jews was important for his concept of the Syrian nation.<sup>152</sup> Given his attempts to nationalize Islam and Christianity as expressions of a Syrian spirit, the conflict with the Jews was closely related to his idea of the Syrian nation. Not only were Jewish assertions of nationhood baseless; in addition, Jewish nationalism was explicitly perceived as an immediate threat obstructing the very existence of the Syrian nation. While Jews lacked all necessary constituents to form a nation, Sa'āda argued, they personified the existing threats faced not only by the Syrian nation, but by others as well.

This facet of Sa'āda's ideological outlook is expressed in detail in articles and statements made in the outlets of the party. The journal *al-Nahḍa*, which was published in Beirut from 1937 onwards, and most importantly *Sūriyā al-Jadīda*, which was published in Brazil since early 1939, offer evidence of a consistent anti-Semitic *Weltanschauung* that went far beyond traditional Christian anti-Jewish resentments.<sup>153</sup> Here, sectarianism, Jewishness and Bolshevism were perceived as being part and parcel of a concerted attack against the nation. Jews, in this regard, were merely symbols for the destructive influences of anti- and non-nationalist thought.

Already in the first number of *Sūriyā al-Jadīda* in March 1939, Sa'āda dedicated an editorial to the renaissance of the Syrian *umma*, in which explicit reference to an assumed Syrian–Jewish antagonism was made. According to Sa'āda, the Syrian nation had recently witnessed a revival, casting off outdated loyalties and regaining its national spirit; yet, such a revival had not been complete, and 'mental–spiritual diseases' of the past – identified here with the striving for 'Jewish particularities'<sup>154</sup> – continued to prevail among parts of its people.

The image of destructive Jewish influences on the nation clearly echoed in other contexts as well; Judaism, for instance, was identified as the driving force of Bolshevism, while the early twentieth century anti-Semitic forgery of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* featured as a way of illustrating the conspiratorial approaches of Judaism to the nations and peoples of the world.<sup>155</sup> Soviet Russia, in this view, had turned into its main bastion. In fact, German–Russian relations

were interpreted according to this mindset. In May 1939, in the light of reports about a possible rapprochement between Hitler and Stalin, *Sūriyya al-Jadīda* had published a comment offering an insight into its ideological outlook:

Will the two opponents agree? Will Hitler and Stalin, the Nazi and the Communist, the enemy of the Jews and the creation of the Jews, reconcile? Will Hitler achieve his last success? Will history grant him the biggest victory that is known [in the history of] mankind? Will he tear away Russia from Bolshevism, and ultimately separate Russia from the democratic countries that are ruled by the Jews? ... We see that Hitler has his hands in these changes [that were recently taking place in the USSR] and that he is working since long for Russia's salvation from the Jews and from Bolshevism. He had been in close contact with Stalin over the last years to determine the fate of the Jews and [to thwart] their ambitions. If our view is correct, Hitler will be the great saviour of Russia, as much as he is the saviour of Germany. This might be the final blow to the states that are flaunting democracy, freedom, and the protection of the weak. ... If this view is correct, Hitler will be the great saviour of human kind from the greatest myth known to history.<sup>156</sup>

During these years, Syrian Nationalist ideology as formulated by Sa'āda was thus devoid of explicit references to German National Socialist racial theories; yet, its notion of authentic nations with distinct characteristics was reminiscent of central patterns of National Socialist thought. In addition, the hostility against Jews as symbols for the existing threats to the foundations of the nation echoed a central feature of the National Socialist world view.

Edmond Rabbath's work *Unité syrienne et devenir arabe* differed in various aspects from Syrian Nationalist thought as formulated by Sa'āda. As a member of the National Bloc and a deputy in the Syrian parliament, the Greek-Orthodox intellectual from Aleppo stood for a secular current of pan-Arab nationalism. Rabbath's defence of the Arab character of the Syrian nation was an important rebuttal of recent French politics. Henri Lammens' *La Syrie. Précis historique*, which had been published in 1921, had furnished French official rhetoric with important arguments for their objections to Arab unity and pan-Arab nationalist politics.<sup>157</sup> Rabbath and, two years after him, in 1939, Zurayq provided detailed responses that were meant to refute these claims of a distinct Syrian history and to emphasize the Arab character of Syria and its shared history and descent within the broader Arab world.<sup>158</sup>

Yet, while Rabbath supported the idea of an ethnic 'amalgam' that lay at the origin of the Arab nation – an idea that went counter to basic National Socialist thought – he introduced a central paragraph of his work with a quotation from Hitler's *Mein Kampf*: 'Men who share the same blood have the same fatherland.'<sup>159</sup> While it was the idea of 'unity' that lay at the centre of his thought – and not 'purity' – Rabbath nevertheless echoed Hitler's claim of an essential territorial link between the nation and its territory. Noteworthy, however, is the fact that Rabbath's thoughts did not imply a German–French antagonism. Writing in 1937

in the wake of the signing of the French–Syrian treaty, the French-educated Rabbath explicitly drew on French historical experiences; for him, quoting Hitler did not evoke a rupture with France.<sup>160</sup> It was the nation's right to its natural territory and national unity that Hitler had justly called for.

In various regards, Zurayq's work *National Consciousness* resembled Rabbath's writings. While Rabbath's thoughts can be read as a defence of Arab nationalism against French objections, Zurayq explicitly addressed an Arab audience.<sup>161</sup> The consolidation of the Arab nation was the main intention of his work. Zurayq called for the formulation of a 'national philosophy' that would allow for the overcoming of 'intellectual anarchy'<sup>162</sup> in Arab society, unifying the Arab nation and creating a shared pan-Arab ethnocultural identity.<sup>163</sup> Reflecting idealistic notions of the Arab nation, his historical deduction of the core of this nation echoed widespread assumptions of an existing distinct Arab civilization. Similarly to Rabbath, the Christian-Orthodox historian did not question the importance of Islamic history for the Arab nation. The importance of Islam, however, was not seen in its religious practices or in its concrete religious interpretations and commandments; rather, it stood for a communal spirit that was to provide guidelines not only for Muslims, but for Arab society as a whole.<sup>164</sup> The distinct 'noble message'<sup>165</sup> of the Arab nation, which it is due to fulfil among the nations, was owed to its shared history and civilization. In this aspect, the Arab nation was no different from others:

This is nothing to be afraid of. The awareness for the message of the nation might in many cases have acquired extremist forms, it may be taken as a cover for material ambitions – as it was done by Western states throughout their colonial history and during the World War, and as it is done by Japan during these days – but in our case the danger is not one of excess and exaggeration, but of neglect and imperfection. We are not befallen by a love to control and to impose rule, but by a lack of determination, and a weakness of faith. We, if we were to adopt this thinking [the belief in the message of the Arab nation], and if we were to feel this awareness, our *jihad* for freedom and independence would acquire a new meaning.<sup>166</sup>

In this context, Zurayq explicitly referred to Germany and its forceful re-emergence among the nations. While such fascination drew on German nineteenth-century Romantic nationalist thought, it reflected ambivalent silence towards National Socialist concepts and thoughts.

### ***Legitimacy of rule and the prospects of political order***

The question of the nation, of its origins and its constituents, was closely linked to questions of rule, the balance of power, and the relations between individual and community. Given the political restrictions under French mandate rule in general and the uncertainties following the conclusion of the treaties with France, the prospects for the social and political order of the future Syrian and Lebanese

states had turned into an ever more urgent issue. The evolving conflict, opposing the Axis powers on the one hand, and Britain and France on the other, further substantiated the need to adopt a position in a possible global confrontation between dictatorial and democratic regimes. The question of legitimacy of rule was highly controversial. It was not necessarily bound to the guarantee of individual rights; instead, in the local context, legitimacy of leadership could as much derive from its successful preservation of the nation. For many, the perception of Nazism and Italian Fascism was thus closely linked to their ability to further national ambitions.

In this regard, cultural journals again played an important role in shaping and mirroring public opinion. *Al-Ḥadīth*, for instance, offered various approaches and perspectives to the crucial questions of the time. Three extended articles by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ṭarzī are noteworthy for their analysis of the ideological and political specificities of Italian Fascism and German Nazism. In his accounts of the take-over of power by these two movements, Ṭarzī traces their origins and their legitimacy as patterns of rule. The establishment of Fascist and National Socialist regimes is depicted here as a reaction to a state of defeat and the spread of anarchy in the midst of society; Mussolini as much as Hitler aimed for a revival, a *nahḍa* of the nation. Despite critical assessments of specific traits of these movements, Ṭarzī nevertheless refrained from questioning the legitimacy of either rule:

We will not be hard in our judgement of Mussolini, because the reforms which he had implemented in Italy prove his capability and his wisdom in organizing affairs. He is an oppressive tyrant, but his tyranny derives from his national compassion.<sup>167</sup>

In a similar way, Nazism was perceived as a basically legitimate project whose judgement should be left to history: the ultimate criteria for an assessment of its rule and its ideological outlook was not its ideology and political practice in itself, but its success in reviving the nation.<sup>168</sup>

Such priority given to the well-being of the nation matched an elitist outlook that characterized most Arab nationalist trends. Despite their immediate origins in an emerging mass mobilization of society, the widespread idea of a national avant-garde leading – and paving – the way for the nation mirrored the image of a strong and resolute leadership determined to rule. As for one, ‘Umar Farrūkh explicitly declared dictatorial rule a necessity and an expression of nature:

There is no doubt that I hate a dictator ruling my life and death; but I respect him because I see the might of his person, which I – as any one else – do not possess. What is love and respect other than fear in the face of something we do not possess!<sup>169</sup>

To this, the ‘symbolic ensemble’<sup>170</sup> of the SNP was an equal in every sense. Since its inception in the early 1930s, the party had longed for an authoritarian order that was not limited to the party itself, but was meant to apply to society as a whole. The quasi-messianic position of Sa‘āda as the leader of the party was not only due

to the difficult conditions of the early clandestine party; it closely reflected the party's understanding of appropriate social relations amongst the nation. Democracy and democratic relations between the state and its citizens, in this view, were mere illusions propagated by European powers to cover its imperial ambitions.<sup>171</sup> The excessive use of oath, symbols, and rituals, which were developed by the party, put the submission of the individual into daily practise.

Such views and practices did not remain unchallenged. With an ever-increasing number of reports about the suppression of rights and liberties in Germany, awareness of the importance of individual rights and freedoms was strengthened in other parts of society. In addition, the success of the Popular Front in France and the threats posed by Nazism and Fascism to democratic societies in Europe had fostered fascination for the ideals of the French Revolution.<sup>172</sup> While support for democracy and human rights was often raised in the context of French–Syrian and French–Lebanese negotiations, circles affiliated to the League against Nazism and Fascism in Syria and Lebanon and the magazine *al-Ṭal'īa* explicitly called for the defence of democracy as a general political vision.

The intellectual and political activist Ra'īf Khūrī was the most explicit in his defence of liberties and individual's rights.<sup>173</sup> In his historical study *Human Rights. From Where and Whither?* which was published in 1937, Khūrī traced the history of social struggles for liberation from oppression and authoritarian rule. Arguing from a Marxist understanding of history, Khūrī saw the extension of rights of the individual vis-à-vis the political powers as a result of a continuous struggle for liberation. Beginning with ancient societies in Pharaonic times, the phases of this struggle – each reflecting a distinct set of social organizations of an increasingly complex human society – had led to the formation of the early twentieth century's bourgeois societies. The three 'classic democratic revolutions'<sup>174</sup> in Britain, America, and France, which were led by the middle classes against the monarchies and the aristocratic order, had considerably strengthened the position of the individual as the source and ultimate aim of political power. Today's European democracies, Khūrī argued, stood for this chapter of human history. Notwithstanding their relative advance, these societies still remained far removed from liberating all its members. While bourgeois revolutions had imposed limited political rights and personal freedoms, economic well-being was still out of reach for most parts of society. Although the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia came close to realizing the liberation of the human being, for Khūrī, liberation from economic inequality remained a major goal for future political struggles in other parts of the world as well. Yet, considering the threats posed by Fascism and Nazism, bourgeois democracy nevertheless represented an important achievement that was worth supporting. Despite the 'betrayal' of the European bourgeoisies, which – while liberating themselves – had transposed oppression to the colonies, the democratic nations were still essential references for local proletarian classes and colonized societies.<sup>175</sup>

The outbreak of the Second World War and the occupation of France by German forces suppressed any hope for a truly republican France. Previously, with the end of the general strike in February 1936, France had temporarily improved its image

as a political and intellectual reference. During these years, the radiance of Germany, as an example of national revival, was closely bound to the decline and re-emergence of popular expectations placed on the French Popular Front government. In addition to the changing hopes that were due to promises and frustrations related to the politics of the French government and local French authorities, profound changes of the existing social and political order contributed to a substantial fascination for the new German regime. The formation of new political actors on the one hand, and the urgent quest for new intellectual premises on the other, significantly prefigured the political options pursued by Levantine societies under French rule. While paramilitary organizations echoed the evolving success of mass politics, the intellectual quest for up-to-date interpretations of society and, even more importantly, for visions of a revival of the nation echoed a state of crisis that had affected Syrian and Lebanese societies.

The idea of revolution – rather than reform – had gained considerable attraction. National Socialist Germany, for some, provided important inspirations. Fascination for the revival of the German nation was not limited to the margins of society, but rather had entered mainstream nationalist discourses. In this regard, the positions adopted by progressive liberal and communist circles that were voicing their concern about the threats of war in Europe involved an explicit message for the local context as well: opposition to Nazism, for them, was no strategic choice, but echoed concerns about various traces of National Socialist thought that risked taking root in local political culture.

## 4 Repercussions of the Second World War

### Facing the Axis in the Levant (1939–1941)

In late May 1940, only weeks before the fall of France and the subsequent imposition of an Italian Armistice Commission in the French mandates, the political activist and intellectual Muḥammad Najātī Ṣidqī concluded writing a study about the principles of Nazism.<sup>1</sup> In the light of an evolving rift within Arab societies regarding the stance towards Nazism, Ṣidqī questioned ever more popular assumptions of an agreement between the Arab-Islamic world and the Nazi movement: *Islamic traditions and the principles of Nazism – do they match?* was the title of his book. Neither intellectually nor strategically, Ṣidqī argued, could Nazism provide inspiration; instead, its ideology was antagonistic towards the essence of Islam. Hence, the ‘taking sides of the Islamic world with the democratic side and its united stand against Nazi tyranny is first of all due to the Islamic spirit.’<sup>2</sup>

Writing in early summer 1940, Ṣidqī’s critique of Nazism mirrored the dramatic developments that had shaken Europe. Following Germany’s attack on Poland on 1 September 1939, France and Great Britain had declared war, claiming leadership in an alliance against Nazi German ambitions. From the outset, this war had surpassed European borders, immediately affecting the Arab Middle East as well. As mandate powers, France as much as Britain had since summer 1939 put into place severe measures to ensure their grip on the respective mandates. According to a contemporary witness of these events, the popularity of ‘Hitler’ and ‘Mussolini’ as names for newborn children stood for the prevailing esteem for these leaders and their impact on the local public.<sup>3</sup> Hitler, in fact, had become commonly known as ‘Abū ‘Alī’, conveying fascination for his determination and bravery.<sup>4</sup>

Economically as much as strategically, mandated Lebanon and Syria were cornerstones for the remaining French empire. The outbreak of the war and the direct threat posed by Germany to the mandate power thus inspired major revisions of regional politics – revisions that were to reverberate in local discourses and to influence nationalist strategies and perspectives.

In noticeable contrast to previous years, only a few first-hand accounts allow for detailed assessments of local encounters with National Socialist Germany during this early period of the Second World War. Adding to the censorship of newspapers, magazines, and books, repression of political activism significantly hindered public debate about imminent questions. Yet, political life did not come to



a standstill; despite the authorities' strict control, many remained engaged in ever more pressing struggles for an independent political order. The confrontation with German Nazism and Italian Fascism obviously echoed in the actions and thoughts of politicians and intellectuals, but in the broader public as well. In the light of the turmoil of these years and the state of emergency – a state of emergency as much in a legal as in a social sense – echoes of such controversies remained fragmented, often reduced to traces left in pamphlets, short articles, speeches, and memoirs. As a major source for the reconstruction of public debates and political life during these years, documents from German and French archives are thus of particular importance – with all the evident limits and reservations. While for the 1930s various accounts from among the population allow popular views and actions to be placed within a broader social, economic, and intellectual context, the following reconstruction is dominated by sources reporting on such encounters, rather than reflecting original voices of those involved on the Arab side. Originating in most cases from within the French and German administration – i.e. notes written by the French Sûreté Générale or reports by the German Abwehr, the intelligence apparatus of the Wehrmacht, or the Auswärtige Amt – these sources place emphasis on security matters and strategic assessments. Appraisals of intellectual contexts and social motivations are rare.

A brief passage dedicated to this period in Albert Hourani's early essay *Syria and Lebanon* paints an image of a society whose sole focus was national independence: political action was limited to the struggle for national sovereignty – repressive French rule and the turmoil of the time left no room for sophisticated ideological reasoning about political strategies and deeds.<sup>5</sup> Yet, it would be a mistake to conclude that this reasoning was non-existent. Even during these years, ideology was not absent; rather, it continued to prefigure political choices and to shape social experiences that were to crystallize in future ideological trends and political currents.<sup>6</sup> While the limitation of contemporary sources thus poses additional obstacles to reconstruct public opinion, in itself it reveals an important feature of this time: these were the years not of a cultural and political blooming; instead, they were times when societies were in waiting, oscillating between submission and resistance to a regional and international context that was out of their control.

### **On the eve of war: echoes of German aggression in the mandates**

From summer 1939 until June 1940, politics in Syria and Lebanon were closely tied to France's conflict with its eastern neighbour. Germany's occupation of Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939, and the Italian attack on Albania in April, had added to the atmosphere of an immediate threat that had taken root in the minds of the European public. On 23 August 1939, the conclusion of the German–Russian non-aggression pact escalated concerns about evolving alliances that would place in question the existing European order.

*Preparing for war*

In May 1939, four months before the outbreak of the war, the French High Commissioner Gabriel Puaux outlined French politics towards the mandates. Following his return from Paris where he had consulted with the French government, Puaux repeated France's willingness to conclude a treaty on the principles laid out in 1936. Yet, for the time being, the threats of war limited French options.<sup>7</sup> In Syria, the enduring crisis of government, which had persisted since the resignation of the government in February 1939, facilitated a direct intervention of the French High Commissioner, who imposed a series of measures that were destined to guarantee the stability of local order. The suspension of the constitution and the dissolution of parliament figured among these. The imposition of a Council of Directors to direct the administrative work completed this intervention, significantly sidelining nationalist influence.<sup>8</sup> In Lebanon, constitutional life was granted an additional period of calm until early September. With the outbreak of the war, here again, the High Commissioner resorted to the dissolution of parliament, the removal of the government, and the suspension of the constitution. The proclamation of martial law and the internment of personalities known for or suspected of pro-Axis inclination paved the way for freezing political activities of any kind. Fearing a possible attack by the Axis powers through the Balkans and Turkey, the stabilization of the inner front in the mandated territories had turned into a key priority. The dissolution of the Arab National Office for Research and Information, the Damascene Arab Club, and the SNP, as well as the imposition of strict censorship on the local press, was part of these measures.<sup>9</sup> On 28 September 1939, the High Commissioner finally ordered the disbanding of the Syrian–Lebanese Communist Party. Despite its declaration of loyalty towards France at the beginning of the war, the French authorities had noted with concern its statements justifying the occupation of the eastern parts of Poland by the Soviet Russian troops.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to these measures, intensive efforts were made to rally public opinion around the Allies' struggle with the *puissances totalitaires*. While the dissolution of political parties and organizations reflected an attempt to prevent any opposition from within, propaganda was another means to distract the public from existing or prospective ties to the German regime. Since the end of April 1939, Germany had taken an active role in the *guerre des ondes*, which had developed between Britain and France on the one hand and Italy on the other.<sup>11</sup> Already in December 1937, during his visit to Berlin, Sa'īd Fattāḥ al-Imām had drawn the attention of German officials to the potential impact of German Arabic broadcasting; for the time being, however, the proposal was rejected by the Auswärtige Amt. In the light of the ongoing 'propaganda war' in the region, German involvement appeared undesirable as it risked being perceived as an anti-British gesture.<sup>12</sup> It was only in late 1938 that such restraint was watered down.

With Italian Radio Bari broadcasting since 1934 in Arabic, the French mandate authorities had observed the growing impact of radio transmissions as a means of propagating Fascist ideas and shaping public opinion. Since the late 1930s,

the Lebanese Yūsuf al-Khāzin acted as a speaker on Radio Bari, giving credibility to its broadcasting to the Levant.<sup>13</sup> In reaction, French radio transmissions were intensified to counter Italian claims that risked weakening French positions. With the German–Russian agreement still in force, reservations among both Muslims and Christians against anti-religious regimes offered starting points to rally religious sentiment in support of the democratic states.<sup>14</sup>

As with the Italian transmissions from Rome and Tripoli, Radio Berlin-Zeesen's Arabic language programme aimed at weakening France's position.<sup>15</sup> Since the outbreak of the war, Germany had shifted the content of its propaganda, which in the pre-war years had remained largely confined to print media and the distribution of pamphlets and books. It had long focused on Germany's supposedly peaceful intentions and diplomatic efforts, which Germany had undertaken in order to achieve justice for the German nation while maintaining peace. By autumn 1939, in contrast, German propaganda outlets began highlighting the conflict with Britain and France and the necessity for their military defeat. This implied calls for dissent in the territories under French and British control. In addition, the trope of the Jew as a shared enemy had acquired an important place in the broadcasts on Radio Berlin-Zeesen.<sup>16</sup>

The Arabic programme gave further impetus to German anti-French propaganda, which continued to be no less intensively pursued by the German press agencies DNB and Transocean.<sup>17</sup> Already by September, the French authorities felt obliged to ban broadcasts from Radio Berlin-Zeesen in public. In the light of a noticeable fascination for the German successes in Poland, which was fostered by news and speeches on German radio, the gatherings in cafes and public places that in the past had produced an audience for German views were now prohibited.<sup>18</sup> Interest in transmissions from Germany, however, continued, and the use of the Iraqi Yūnis al-Barī as a major speaker of the Arabic language broadcasts added to its popularity.<sup>19</sup> Spreading rumours about measures taken by French authorities to obstruct Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca was one of the means used to draw on public concerns.<sup>20</sup> No less prominent was the featured reading of pro-German articles that had previously been published in Arab newspapers. As supposedly authentic voices of the Arab world, the use of such articles allowed for the transmission of German perspectives as formulated by Arab intellectuals and activists. Newspapers that were edited by Syrian–Lebanese emigrants – amongst them the SNP-affiliated *Sūriyā al-Jadīda* – offered articles that served as welcome confirmations of official German declarations.<sup>21</sup>

The French administration had set up a programme to counter the effects of such propaganda. Since early November, the French authorities in Damascus organized a daily screening of news in local cinemas in French and Arabic languages. With reduced prices for students, the events aimed at a younger educated audience, yet they also included special arrangements in locations that attracted a broader, often illiterate populace.<sup>22</sup> In addition, a series of public conferences was organized that was intended to provide a forum for intellectuals, potentially supporting the Allies' cause. A first conference was held in December in the amphitheatre of Damascus University with the renowned intellectual Muḥammad Kurd 'Alī, the

former head of the Académie Arabe, who was speaking about the ‘General characteristics of the Ommayyids’. Two weeks later, former Syrian minister Muṣṭafā Shihāb was to address a similar audience with a lecture about ‘Racism from a political, philosophical and social perspective’.<sup>23</sup> Although not all of these talks entailed a clear political message, a French-sponsored cultural programme, which combined topics related to questions of ancient Arab-Islamic history with lectures about contemporary developments, allowed the highlighting of French goodwill towards local history and traditions.

### ***Facing the choice: democracy or dictatorship***

Such efforts were not entirely in vain. Censorship and propaganda had encouraged expressions of support for the democratic states. Various newspapers that in the past had remained ambiguous about Nazism and German politics now energetically sided with the mandate power. In addition, the cooperation of Arab personalities with the German regime now drew sharp criticism. Referring to Yūnis al-Barī and Shakīb Arslān, who had supposedly been declared ‘an honorary Aryan’<sup>24</sup> by Hitler, several critical articles appeared in the local French and Arabic press.<sup>25</sup>

Assumed similarities between Islamic traditions and European democracies were central to articles that were published in cultural magazines. Reproducing a speech that had been broadcast earlier on French Radio Orient under the title ‘Democracy and the Arabs’, the Aleppine magazine *al-Ḥadīth* explicitly called on the Arab world to join the battle against Nazism for its own ends.<sup>26</sup> *al-ʿIrfān*, a magazine of Shia-affiliation published in Saʿīda, shared this view; again, Islam itself was depicted as the source of Arab desires for the victory of democracy.<sup>27</sup>

Such expressions of solidarity with the Allies were not limited to the press; leading personalities went public with their support for France as a sole guarantor of independence. While the former leader of the Syrian revolt of the mid-1920s, the Druze Sulṭān Atrash, distanced himself from the pro-German stance adopted by Shakīb Arslān,<sup>28</sup> the Maronite Archbishop of Beirut, Ignatius Mubārak, voiced support for the Allies. In a sermon held in the cathedral of St Georges in Beirut on 15 March 1940, Mubārak demanded to ‘pray for the victory of those powers who are defending the small nations’ right to life.<sup>29</sup> Leaders of Lebanese parties and the Syrian National Bloc added to these voices, inspiring rather confident assessments of the situation in the mandated territories amongst French officials.<sup>30</sup>

Yet, support for France and its British ally was not unquestioned. Contacts and affinities to Germany that in the past had been entertained by some personalities in press and politics survived both French administrative repressions and the turmoil of events in Europe. In a message to the High Commissioner, Amīn al-Ḥusaynī, who had since October 1937 taken refuge in a village close to the Lebanese town of Jounieh, where he was placed under supervision by the French authorities, declared his gratitude for France’s willingness to grant asylum to thousands of Palestinians.<sup>31</sup> Ḥusaynī nevertheless avoided an explicit statement that could be regarded as supportive of the democratic states in their struggle against Nazism.

An expression of solidarity with France at the outset of the war would surely have left its marks on a public that had closely followed the events in Palestine and the political activities of its exiled leader. In his memoirs, the Lebanese 'Uthmān Kamāl Ḥaddād, a personal collaborator of Ḥusaynī, details the context of Ḥusaynī's message and the considerations that had led to its formulation. According to Ḥaddād, the head of the French Sûreté Générale, François Colombani, had approached Ḥusaynī, shortly after the outbreak of the war, demanding his signing of a pre-formulated message in support of France that was to be published in the Arab press. Ḥusaynī rejected this, but promised to provide an alternative statement. Following consultations with his entourage, it appeared impossible for him to support the allied powers due to their politics in the Middle East.<sup>32</sup> Ḥusaynī anticipated the discontent of the French authorities with this response and by mid-October secretly left for Baghdad to avoid French retaliation.

The stand taken by several prominent journalists was similarly ambiguous. As public figures, who in many cases had themselves held political functions, journalists served as starting points for German interventions. Jibrān Tuwaynī was one of the most reputable among those who in the past had maintained contacts with German officials. The former minister and founder of *al-Nahār* had been in contact with the German consulate in the late 1930s. While he remained opposed to Nazism as an authoritarian regime, his enmity towards Zionism had allowed for sympathies for the German case against the Jews. The German consulate thus considered Tuwaynī a 'convinced anti-Semite'<sup>33</sup> and for a long time held him in high esteem. In 1937, the German Consul General even suggested him to the Ministry of Propaganda as eligible to be included in an invitation to Arab journalists due to tour Germany.<sup>34</sup> In addition, according to French reports, Tuwaynī had temporarily received financial support from German sources, and through Kāmil Murūwa, a collaborator to *al-Nahār* at the time, had approached the German ambassador in Turkey in an attempt for further rapprochements.<sup>35</sup> As these approaches ultimately failed, most probably due to Tuwaynī's objection to Nazi politics in general, Tuwaynī sided with the Allies.

In contrast, Murūwa continued to voice sympathies for the German regime and to foster relations with them. Being a member of the ANP, his stance was not atypical for the party and many of its members. Since the troubles of early 1939 that had shaken Damascus, the French authorities had imprisoned several members who were accused of stirring up unrest and public disorder. In the light of these circumstances governing both Lebanon and Syria, the Supreme Council of the party had decided to close down its Beirut centre and to relocate its leadership to Baghdad. While the members of the movement were called on to limit their activities, Quṣṭanṭīn Zurayq stepped down from his post as president, transferring all his party functions to Kāzīm al-Ṣulḥ.<sup>36</sup>

None of the administrative measures were levelled against the ANP as such. Its secrecy had allowed it to remain undiscovered as an organization. Up until its closure in September 1939, the Damascene *al-Nādī al-'Arabī* was one of the most prominent party outlets. Based on his links to German officials, its president Sa'īd Fattāḥ al-Imām was one of the main targets of French repressions. While

the club was closed down and its documents confiscated, Imām managed to hide in Damascus, and ultimately fled to Baghdad.

The SNP was another major concern for the French authorities. Its popularity – the party had an estimated 5,000–6,000 supporters in 1939 – highlighted its role as a political actor.<sup>37</sup> While Sa'āda's exile had affected the party's activities, its cells and members continued to follow instructions that were transmitted through pamphlets and, according to French reports, through clandestine broadcasting. In October 1939, the French military justice opened an investigation against several of its members. Based on individual activities and, most importantly, on tracts written by Sa'āda that were interpreted as open calls for resistance, the party appeared as a relevant threat to the local order.<sup>38</sup>

While it was impossible to prove relations with the Axis, the party's ideological orientation was a cause for concern. Sa'āda's visit to Rome and Berlin in autumn 1938 was a case in point. Fearing renewed reprisals, Sa'āda had in June 1938 left Beirut for an extended visit of the various party branches in South America. On his way, Sa'āda spent nearly three months in Italy and Germany, meeting various members of the local cells and handing down instructions.<sup>39</sup> In Berlin, Sa'āda's visit reportedly coincided with the local branch's sixth anniversary, adding to the excitement of the local community.<sup>40</sup> Given the attention that he had received from German officials, and the fact of an active SNP-cell in Berlin, Sa'āda's relations with the Axis powers were thought to have further intensified. Rumours even circulated according to which Sa'āda had actually met with Hitler.<sup>41</sup>

Soon after his arrival in Brazil, the local authorities voiced concern about his presence, for their part opening a judicial investigation to scrutinize his pro-Axis affiliations. In late March 1939, Sa'āda was arrested. While he admitted to encounters with German and Italian officials, Sa'āda convinced the authorities that he entertained neither ideological sympathies nor strategic interest with regard to either Axis power. What was more, during his interrogation Sa'āda claimed that his encounters with Nazi and Fascist officials had left him disillusioned; French rule, Sa'āda argued, would be preferable to Italian or German.<sup>42</sup> Five weeks later, he was released from prison.

Given the views reflected in *Sūriyā al-Jadīda*, the party's newspaper that was published in Sao Paulo, doubts about Sa'āda's position prevailed. Copies of the newspaper were available in the mandates and the French authorities closely scrutinized the various articles that reflected pro-National Socialist views. In addition to its glorification of the *zā'im*, the newspaper regularly featured reports and comments depicting the Allied war effort as an injustice against the German nation. Numerous anti-Semitic articles further highlighted the threat of a potential alliance between Sa'āda's party and the Axis.<sup>43</sup>

Since his release from prison and settling in Argentina, Sa'āda had noted with concern the mounting pressure against him and his party, both in exile and in the territories under French mandate. Despite his frequent and detailed directives, which he had passed on to the editing board of *Sūriyā al-Jadīda*, the paper published several articles that were counter to his strategy. In a lengthy letter to the paper's board of 10 November 1939, Sa'āda voiced sharp criticism about its

management and its editorial laxness with regard to content. As Sa'āda himself put it, the editorial line of *Sūriyā al-Jadīda* had in the recent past become 'more "Nazi" than Syrian nationalist'.<sup>44</sup> Pointing to the repressions directed against the party, Sa'āda outlined in detail the political directives that were to serve as a guideline for the editorial policy of the paper:

1. The politics of the Syrian Nationalist Party is independent Syrian nationalist politics, which is not mixed with politics of any foreign power. ...
2. The politics of the Syrian Nationalist Party is not fascist. 3. The politics of the Syrian Nationalist Party is not National Socialist [*nāzī*]. 4. The politics of the Syrian Nationalist Party is not 'democratic'. 5. The politics of the Syrian Nationalist Party is neither communist nor Bolshevik. 6. The politics of the Syrian Nationalist Party are Syrian nationalist politics that submit to none other than the eighth basic principle [of the party]: 'Syria's interest is above all other interest.'
7. On this basis, the politics of *Sūriyā al-Jadīda* are neither fascist, nor National Socialist, nor 'democratic', nor communist or Bolshevik; they are Syrian nationalist. ...
12. At present, the political stand of the party towards France is one of attack against France and its Syrian policy, without closing all doors [for any future rapprochement]. The intention is to prompt France's convergence into the direction of the party. ...
13. The current political stand of the party towards the Rome–Berlin Axis is, in the first place, one of limited support to produce sufficient pressure on France and Britain to provoke a change of their negative stance towards Syria and its nationalist revival [*nahḍa*]. It is not meant to reflect trust in the politics of the said Axis or [to long for] the destruction of France and Britain.
14. The stand of the party towards the Berlin–Moscow axis is still in discussion.
15. As a result of [the mentioned] points 12, 13, 14, the administration and the editorial board of *Sūriyā al-Jadīda* have to avoid any unrestricted support for Rome and Berlin, and to direct their attack against France and Britain [based on nothing but] a Syrian nationalist perspective – and not from a perspective [that would take position in] the dogmatic or ideological conflicts between the totalitarian [*al-kulliyya*] and the democratic camps.<sup>45</sup>

In the light of rumours about Sa'āda's links to the Axis, such guidelines were required to avoid arrests and political persecutions. As a political statement, Sa'āda's directives reflected a position that was already adopted in the aftermath of the party's exposure in late 1935: links to foreign powers or outside inspirations risked blurring the party's claim of authenticity. As such, the statement refrained from assessing the evident ideological question raised by the 'conflict between the totalitarian and democratic camps' that was alluded to in this letter.

The ambiguity of this position was not only visible in the conflict between Sa'āda and the editors of the newspaper; it was echoed in political statements made by leading party members in Lebanon and Syria. Notwithstanding the continuing correspondence, the party's declarations and activities increasingly escaped Sa'āda's control. As one incident on the eve of war illustrated, even among the

party's leading personalities who had remained in close contact with its head in exile, Germany had indeed turned into an option. During a public function in Bayt Mary on 29 August, two days before the beginning of the war, members of the party had confidently expressed their conviction that German forces would soon arrive in the Levant, forcing the French occupier to leave the country. In their talks, these speakers claimed the presence of some 70 supporters of the SNP in Germany who were supposedly counselling the party about the developing events.<sup>46</sup> In the months following the outbreak of the war, the authorities observed various similar incidents that had involved members of the SNP.<sup>47</sup> For these members, the programmatic outlook of the party obviously implied support for the Axis.

The threat of reprisals was no less pressing to Shakīb Arslān, the editor of *La Nation Arabe* in Geneva. In February 1939, Arslān had temporarily left Switzerland for Damascus following France's decision to give in to demands raised by the Syrian government and its acceptance of Arslān's return to the mandates. Yet, rumours about potential problems with the French authorities that Arslān might be facing upon his arrival in Damascus provoked a lengthy stopover in Egypt, from where finally, in summer 1939, he returned to Geneva.<sup>48</sup> Mounting financial problems were among the reasons that had then prompted a renewed visit to Berlin. Three weeks after the beginning of the war, Arslān appeared in the German capital and did nothing to reduce the political symbolism of such a gesture. The German as well as the French media reported his appearance, depicting the visit as an explicit statement in the context of the war. On his return to Switzerland only a few weeks later, an inquiry was opened that threatened to call into question Arslān's residence rights in Geneva. Although this threat was finally averted, Arslān was informed that if he were to leave the country again in the future, his re-entry would be prevented.<sup>49</sup> Deprived of the various freedoms he had enjoyed and limited to few platforms from which to publicize his opinions, the obstacles posed by the Swiss authorities for the publication of *La Nation Arabe* further sidelined a voice that had significantly shaped the Arab struggles during the past two decades.

The fate of going into exile, which was central to the experience of many activists at this time, was an expression of the entanglement of Arab struggles with the mounting conflicts among the European powers. In summer 1940, while France had been defeated at home, political opposition in the mandates was successfully suppressed. As much as the imminent German occupation of France, the exile of leading nationalist circles was to turn into an important factor for shaping the Levantine political scenery in the near future. In June 1940, the choice between solidarity and opposition to France – and in consequence, also to Germany – posed itself in an entirely new light.

### **Local politics and the conflict between Britain, Free France, and the Axis: resistance, accommodation, and collaboration**

On 22 June 1940, the German–French Armistice Agreement was signed. Two days later, on 24 June, a similar agreement was concluded in Rome between Italy



and France. The conventions were meant to regulate France's relations with the Axis and to establish preliminary rules for cooperation and the administration of the territories affected by the French defeat. The French Levantine mandates, however, were only dealt with in passing; in fact, only the French–Italian convention included an article detailing the respective steps to be taken and the distribution of responsibilities and competencies. Italy had entered the war no earlier than 10 June, encouraged by Germany's unexpectedly rapid successes on the western front. Since the creation of the Axis in late 1936, Germany had accepted Italy's priority both in North Africa and in the Levant, leaving these regions to Italian ambitions. Hitler's disinterest in the Arab world and the strategic priorities in Europe had allowed Germany's ally a rather free hand. Hitler's decision to direct the next offensive against Soviet Russia, which was already taken in late 1940, further restrained investment in potential developments in the Mediterranean. The signing of the armistice agreements reflected these priorities, much to the dismay of the French government. Exposing the French Mediterranean territories to Italian manoeuvres, Germany knowingly aggravated French alarm. Not only had France lost control over the Mediterranean; it had lost this control to its major strategic foe.

Both armistice conventions called for a demobilization and disarmament of French forces that were not required to maintain order and for territorial defence.<sup>50</sup> The French–Italian convention clarified the administrative procedures through which French measures would be supervised. Among these, it regulated the creation of an Italian Armistice Commission (IAC) that was charged with the supervision of the implementation of the convention and the harmonization of the measures with Germany and France.<sup>51</sup>

### *The Armistice Commission and Axis networking*

The creation of the IAC, whose headquarters were located in Turin, was soon followed in late August by the installation of a delegation in Beirut. In addition to some 50 Italian officials, it included several local agents and a handful of German officials.<sup>52</sup> Not all were pleased by the arrival of the delegation. While the French High Commissioner Puaux was concerned about the now immediate Italian access to the mandates, Britain expressed a strong objection to any Axis-led occupation or any military use of the territories. The concern among the local public was no less obvious. The Italian presence was viewed in the same context as Italian expansionism in Northern and Eastern Africa; the Italian occupation of Albania in April 1939 and Italy's involvement in the disputes over the Sanjak only gave an additional reason to suspect similar objectives in the Levant. Even more important was a growing conviction that France's defeat had actually called into question the very existence of the mandate as an internationally legitimized framework of foreign rule. Given the new situation, for many, the time had come to turn a long-standing demand into reality – this was now formulated as 'Syria for the Syrians!'<sup>53</sup>

Since the arrival of the Italian commission, Italian officials made considerable efforts to improve Italy's standing with the local public; despite explicit limitations of the IAC's formal functions, members of the commission soon began agitating against the French administration. In addition to a statement in favour of Arab independence, Italian officials pursued various channels to promote Italian interests in the mandates.<sup>54</sup> In this respect, priority was given to the Maronite community. A Free French report about the activities of the IAC reveals close contacts with local political and religious Maronite leaders.<sup>55</sup> In addition to encounters with the archbishops 'Abdallāh Khūrī and Ignatius Mubārak, Italian officials had approached the Supreme Council of the Maronite Phalangists. Facilitated by the intermediary work of Yūsuf al-Khāzin and Yūsuf Sawdā, the commission tended to foster an image of Fascist Italy as a guarantor of an independent Christian Lebanon. Strong protests by the French government against such activities, which were a direct threat to the French position, finally led the IAC in Beirut to slow down its campaign.<sup>56</sup>

By November 1940, in the light of the obstacles that were in the way of a rapprochement with the Maronites, Italian officials shifted direction. Again, Sawdā's role was important. Openly announcing an Italian desire to take over the mandates from France, Italian officials had – apparently all the while lobbying for Maronite sympathies – assured Muslim interlocutors of their intention to improve the economic situation and to work for a unified Arab state under a Muslim ruler. These efforts produced no change in the broader public opinion. While Italian attempts to buy the voice of local newspapers met with reluctant responses, a meeting with prominent Muslim figures organized by the commission did nothing to overcome concerns about Italian intentions.<sup>57</sup> Another channel pursued by the IAC was more successful. Through the intermediary activity of Iskandir al-Riyāshī, a former editor of the journal *al-Ṣiḥāfī al-Ta'ih*, Italian officials had reportedly managed to convince the leading nationalist personalities Riyāḍ al-Ṣulḥ, Iḥsān al-Jābirī, Farīd Zayn al-Dīn, and Shukrī al-Quwwatī to coordinate Arab nationalist politics in close relation with Italy.<sup>58</sup> Such ambitions tended to counter the German influence that had prevailed amongst Arab nationalists in the mandated territories. Here, Quwwatī's role in this regard, was important: his ascent to the leadership of the National Bloc had given a vehement opponent to the French authorities additional power. With most prominent representatives of the Bloc in exile, Quwwatī joined in the regional manoeuvres of the European powers. From his point of view, the option of supporting the Axis was to be exploited in order to further weaken France's standing.<sup>59</sup>

Italian attempts to draw these circles under their influence increasingly encountered German opposition. Despite Germany's reluctance to get involved in the region, the French defeat in June 1940 had given renewed momentum to the activities of German agents. Since the late 1930s, the French authorities had noted with concern the installation of dozens of German agents in the region, thus establishing a close network under German influence.<sup>60</sup> Equipped with fabricated passports and working under cover as exiled German Jews, tourists, journalists, or archaeologists, these agents, who were often linked to the German Abwehr,

did not restrict themselves to the collection of information. Various French and British reports highlighted their role in organizing political opposition, smuggling weapons and sabotaging mostly British interests.<sup>61</sup>

The arrival of Rudolf Roser, a member of the Abwehr, in Beirut in late summer 1940 allowed for a resurgence of German activities in the French mandates.<sup>62</sup> While he was formally charged to protect German properties and interests and to organize the repatriation of German civilians who had been interned by the authorities at the beginning of the war, his mission far exceeded his publicly acknowledged functions. Posing as a commercial attaché to the IAC, Roser took up residence in the Beirut Hotel Métropole, which was to turn into a major hub of pro-German propaganda and networking. Roser, who had himself acquired substantial knowledge of the mandates during a two year stay in Beirut as a representative of a German company, was joined by a number of other Germans with long-standing relations with the Arab Middle East. Amongst them, the former secretary of the German consulate general in Beirut, Paula Koch, was an influential member of his entourage.<sup>63</sup>

Roser's activities were not limited to propaganda, but were aimed at coordinating with Arab nationalist circles. While financial support was granted to various journalists, Roser remained in close contact with paid informants that provided detailed information about political developments and served as interlocutors to nationalists of various organizational affiliations.<sup>64</sup> In this regard, Rashād Barbīr, Kāmil Murūwa, and Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Ṭawīl were identified by French sources as the most relevant paid informants serving the German interest, facilitating meetings with prominent notables and political leaders.<sup>65</sup> Since the late 1930s, Murūwa had entertained close contacts with the DNB, only to serve later as a representative of the German news agency Transocean in Beirut. His close relations with Arab nationalist groupings had made him an effective intermediary for German–Arab encounters. During October 1940 and June 1941 alone, the French Sûreté Générale aux Armées observed eight visits by Murūwa to Turkey, where he reportedly met with Seiler, the former German consul in Beirut, to coordinate German–Arab relations.<sup>66</sup> No less important for Roser's activities were his relations with former Syrian and Lebanese officers who had served in the Ottoman army. Given the pro-German inclinations within the higher echelons of the late Ottoman empire, the former Ottoman officers Muṣṭafā Ṣabrī al-'Ard and Aḥmad Mukhtār al-Ṣulḥ provided access to local Muslim personalities. This network gradually extended in the months following Roser's arrival in Beirut, and, by early 1941, Germany could base its interventions on several influential figures.

Opposition to such rapprochements to the Axis and its agents had not completely ceased. While the German–Russian agreement was still in force, local communist circles were among those who continued to object to the growing influence of the Axis. In spite of massive repressions that had led to the arrest of various communist leaders, among them Khālīd Bakdāsh, Faraj Allāh al-Ḥilū, and Niqūlā Shāwī, since summer 1940, several members had started to take up their activities; the publication of a clandestine newspaper in the name of the party under the title *Niḍāl al-Sha'b* was one.<sup>67</sup> As a handwritten pamphlet, the paper

provided one of the rare opportunities to voice uncensored demands and criticism of the local government and its Axis partners. Despite its explicit objection to the Axis powers as the most aggressive expressions of imperialist rule, such a position did not imply any concession to the Allied powers. On the eve of the Iraqi–British conflict, in March 1941, the paper strongly criticized not only Axis ambitions in Africa and the Arab Middle East, but British intentions as well: ‘No British, no Germans, no Italians, but bread, freedom and independence!’<sup>68</sup> was its slogan. While the Soviet Army figured as the sole force of liberation, neither France and Britain, nor Germany and Italy, offered any hope for a realization of communist social and national demands.

### ***Pan-Arab nationalists in Baghdad and the French mandates***

The struggle for Syria and Lebanon had acquired an ever more regional dimension. The defeat of France and its division into two opposing camps under the respective leadership of Maréchal Pétain and General Charles de Gaulle had further complicated French strategies. In addition, the strategic importance of Syria and Lebanon – with the Mediterranean to the west and the oil fields of Mosul and the Jazira to the east, with Turkey and the Caucasus in the north and Palestine in the south – had drawn all neighbouring countries into the conflict.<sup>69</sup>

The exile of several Syrian and Lebanese personalities in Baghdad only added to this. Since late summer 1940, the Syrian–Lebanese expatriate community had regained confidence in a foreseeable end to the French mandate. During these months, ‘the true centre of Syrian political life was Baghdad’.<sup>70</sup> In the light of the French defeat in June 1940 and its weakened standing in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Iraqi government was tempted to make use of the French crisis and to reassess the prospects of Iraqi–Syrian unity.<sup>71</sup>

In August 1940, German officials received knowledge about the recent formation of a Baghdad-based Arab committee that was meant to coordinate and direct Arab relations.<sup>72</sup> According to ‘Uthmān Kamāl Ḥaddād, the committee consisted – among others – of Iraqi Prime Minister Kaylānī, the Syrian nationalist leaders Quwwatlī and ‘Ādil Arslān, and two high-ranking advisers of the Saudi Monarch Ibn Sa‘ūd. Headed by Amīn al-Ḥusaynī, such a grouping was as much anti-British as it was pro-Axis.<sup>73</sup>

Soon after his departure from Lebanon, Ḥusaynī had established close ties with local political circles in Baghdad. Central to Ḥusaynī’s agitation was his critique of the recent breaking-off of diplomatic relations with Germany, which had been decided following strong British pressure in September 1939 by the then Prime Minister Nūrī al-Sa‘īd.<sup>74</sup> From Ḥusaynī’s perspective, Germany was a necessary ally for the Arab struggle of independence. His vehement lobbying among Iraqi nationalists for a reconsideration of German–Iraqi relations ultimately facilitated the fall of the Sa‘īd government in late March 1940; while Sa‘īd remained in the cabinet as minister of foreign affairs, Rashīd ‘Alī al-Kaylānī took over as prime minister.<sup>75</sup>

Support for Ḥusaynī's overtures to Germany was considerable. In addition to the endorsement by members of the Iraqi government that were known for their pro-German inclinations, exiled members of the Syrian and Lebanese branch of the ANP were possible allies for Ḥusaynī's ambitions. Already by early 1940, Syrian nationalist expatriates in Iraq had worked for the creation of secret cells that would allow a rebellion in case of need. According to French sources, such plans included preparations for armed attacks in the Euphrates-region.<sup>76</sup> Around the same time, in late April 1940, the ANP had formally reconstituted the party. During a first meeting in exile, the leadership of the ANP intended to outline the party's prospect strategy and to reorganize its structure.<sup>77</sup> With Kāzim al-Ṣulḥ, Yūnis al-Sab'āwī, Darwīsh Miqdādī and Wāṣif Kamāl being elected to the party's Supreme Council, activists dominated the leadership that in the past had shown strong interest in an Arab–German alignment.<sup>78</sup>

Although nationalist activists who had explicit pro-German ambitions rose to the top of pan-Arab struggles, tensions were noticeable between the various actors. While the strained relations were partly due to personal conflicts and differing priorities given to the struggles for the liberation of Iraq, Palestine, Syria and Lebanon, the extent of possible alliances with the Axis was disputed as well.<sup>79</sup> Referring to brief remarks in documents of the ANP, the historian and former member of the ANP, Shafīq Juḥā, highlights a conflict between Imām, the former head of the *Nādī al-'Arabī*, and the party. Imām's explicit and unconditional favouring of Germany, which was in line with Ḥusaynī, was not shared without reservation by the all members of the party's leadership.<sup>80</sup>

That said, at least in its early months the said committee was limited to a rather loose network, with Ḥusaynī's leadership being anything but established. Yet, the political weight of the committee was far from marginal. Given the support granted by members of the Iraqi government, the grouping soon emerged as an important factor for Arab–German relations. In late June, Ḥusaynī had already facilitated a mission that was to contact the German ambassador in Ankara, von Papen, and to consult with the Germans about the future of the Arab countries.<sup>81</sup> The outcome of this mission was no immediate success; while von Papen expressed sympathies with the Arab cause, he emphasized Italian priority in questions related to the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>82</sup>

Despite this setback and persistent doubts about Germany's intentions, the pan-Arab community in Baghdad continued to express interest for Axis support. Renewed attempts to ensure a declaration in the name of the German and Italian governments in favour of the Arab cause reflected a consensus in these circles. Yet, when a brief declaration in support of Arab independence was finally made in late October 1940 – following lengthy negotiations between 'Uthmān Kamāl Ḥaddād, an envoy of the Arab committee, and German officials in Berlin – Arab reactions were all but enthusiastic.<sup>83</sup> While the declaration had left some impression on the general public, political leaders who were involved in relations with Germany openly expressed profound disappointment about the vagueness of the statement and the implied lack of commitment.<sup>84</sup> For one, Shakīb Arslān, who himself had in the past striven for a declaration of the Axis, did not hide his

frustration about the continuing unwillingness of the Axis to formally pledge an alliance with the Arab nationalist movement.<sup>85</sup> The ANP proved no less annoyed. In a memorandum published on 1 November, the party highlighted the elusiveness of the statement, and concluded: 'We said [in the past] and we continue to say: the liberation of the Arabs is the task of the Arabs alone. Therefore, they are obliged to rely on themselves.'<sup>86</sup>

### *Hentig's mission and the establishment of a 'Fifth Column'*

The German authorities were aware of the disappointment on the Arab side and the risk this entailed of alienating a potential ally. In the light of mounting criticism of the IAC amongst the Syrian and Lebanese public, the German position gradually began to change in late 1940.<sup>87</sup> In a memorandum written in early December 1940 by Legationsrat Melchers of the Auswärtige Amt, explicit reference was made to the increasing resonance of General Charles de Gaulle and Britain. While Melchers expressed reservations about showing too strong a commitment to Arab demands, he emphasized an urgent need to ensure Arab sympathies. A German promise to advocate the creation of a Greater Syrian state and to strive for a solution to the problem of Palestine was part of his proposal. More important, however, was his support for an idea that had recently been floated among officials of the Auswärtige Amt. In the light of a growing unease with Italian politics in the mandates, German officials seriously considered the envoy of a German commission to Beirut that was to cooperate with both the IAC and the French High Commissioner.<sup>88</sup> The French authorities in Paris had been informed about German intentions to delegate Werner Otto von Hentig temporarily to Beirut. Hentig's reputation and his long-standing engagement in German intelligence gathering in the Middle East, yet also his rather questionable cover as an economic attaché, obviously aroused suspicions.<sup>89</sup> In early January, the French authorities finally gave in to strong German pressure. Immediately afterwards, Hentig was assigned to scrutinize the state of affairs under the French mandates, and to evaluate the threats posed by Britain and by Gaullist elements within the French authorities.<sup>90</sup>

Hentig's arrival in Beirut on 11 January 1941 came at a crucial moment. Continuing efforts by French officials to undermine the standing of the Axis and British propaganda had harmed public sympathies for both Axis powers. At the same time, the imminent economic crisis and a general state of public disorder had given momentum to renewed political activities among local nationalist circles. Facing general dissatisfaction and an increasing sense of uncertainty among the broad spectrum of society, various local nationalist groupings slowly re-emerged into the public eye. Although many of these formations traded under familiar names, previous distinctions were blurred. For the moment, the boundaries of these groupings were flexible, allowing for significant overlapping of the diverse circles and organizations.

Since late 1940, several Syrian nationalists of various affiliations, some of whom had only recently been released from French internment, again engaged in a revival of political action, with members of the National Youth, the League of

National Action, and the ANP taking the lead. By early 1941, cells of pan-Arab nationalist groupings had spread to most Lebanese and Syrian towns; many of its members had previously entertained relations with the ANP and the Palestine Defence Committee. While Kāmil Murūwa had reportedly achieved a leading role in Beirut, the two German-educated brothers 'Abd Allāh and 'Abd al-Ḥamid al-Bīsār held similar positions in Tripoli. Other groupings were observed in Homs, Lattaqia, and Baalbek.<sup>91</sup> In Damascus, an organization was formed under the leadership of Iḥsān al-Bizrī and Sa'adī Kaylānī who had previously been engaged in substantial relations with representatives of the German Abwehr. According to the French reports, this organization submitted to directives from Amīn al-Ḥusaynī and Sa'īd Fattāḥ al-Imām.<sup>92</sup> Despite continuing reservations vis-à-vis the National Bloc, these circles initiated consultations with Shukrī Quwwatī that were ultimately aiming at a clandestine coordination of a broad range of nationalist actors.<sup>93</sup>

These networks were not limited to Syria, but extended to Lebanon as well. A Beirut-based Comité National brought together various political currents.<sup>94</sup> In this context, a report by the French authorities about the political orientation of major Muslim-Lebanese families, which was written in February 1941, documented the prominence of anti-French convictions and pro-German inclinations in leading strata of Lebanese society.<sup>95</sup>

Contacts between these organizations and German officials were repeatedly mentioned in French reports. While these groupings were no German creations, in some cases, German support had obviously facilitated their re-emergence. Leading members of the Beirut Comité National had in fact entertained close contacts with Roser; to a certain extent, this was also true for Quwwatī and other personalities within his network. Roser's connections were an effective starting point for Hentig's mission. Soon after his arrival in Beirut, Hentig got in touch with several personalities who had acquired leading positions in the daily political struggles. A first meeting was convened at the Hotel Métropole in Beirut, allowing for discussions with Muslim and Druze personalities about the current situation.<sup>96</sup> 'Umar Dā'wuq, the then minister Aḥmad Dā'wuq, Muḥammad 'Alī Bayhum, Riyāḍ al-Ṣulḥ, Aḥmad Mukhtār al-Ṣulḥ, 'Ādil and Majīd Arslān were among those who were present.

While Hentig called on the participants to unite their ranks in order to achieve independence and Arab unity, he was eager to listen to their demands. During the next four weeks of Hentig's stay in Lebanon and Syria, similar exchanges were organized at the residences of Aḥmad Mukhtār al-Ṣulḥ and 'Ādil Arslān. According to French sources, the meeting at the home of Arslān ultimately led to the organization of a broader gathering of Muslim personalities. Again, family members of the Ṣulḥs, the Arslāns and the Bayhums attended, as did leading personalities of the *Najjāda* such as Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Nuṣūlī and Jamīl Makāwī. With Kāmil Murūwa, Rashād Barbīr and 'Afīf Tībī, three other individuals attended who had close relations with German officials. The event was meant to encourage pan-Arab Muslim cooperation.<sup>97</sup>

In the light of the urgent threats posed by a possible British offensive against Syria and Lebanon, Hentig's efforts were particularly meant to engage the youth. In late January, Hentig summoned several members of the *Najjāda* to highlight the importance of paramilitary formations and to draw attention to German youth organizations as an important factor for Germany's strength in the current war. In addition to suggested exchanges and cooperation with the Iraqi youth formation *al-Futuwwa*, the German envoy reportedly granted financial and material support to the *Najjāda*, noticeably increasing the public visibility of the formation.<sup>98</sup>

Similarly, Hentig was a welcome interlocutor to circles related to Munīr al-Rayyis and Shukrī al-Quwwatī. In his memoirs, Rayyis recounts the importance attributed to Hentig's visit, which had led the committee to arrange for a secret meeting with the German envoy in Beirut. Although the encounter did not produce any concrete arrangements, it allowed for an open exchange of views and a clarification of Arab expectations with regard to German support.<sup>99</sup> Interest was mutual, and few efforts were necessary to arrange for additional meetings and exchanges. During his visit to Damascus, Hama, Aleppo, Tripoli, and Lattaqia, Hentig had easy access to leaders of various political movements and religious and ethnic communities. Within the broader public, his visits were followed with no less interest. In some places, Hentig's delegation was received by larger crowds that reportedly chanted a then popular rhyme: 'No monsieur, no mister/All of you out/get out of here/In heaven God, on earth Hitler/Fini monsieur, fini mister!'<sup>100</sup> A statement that was attributed in a French report to Riyāḍ al-Ṣulḥ and 'Ādil Arslān allows us to capture the atmosphere of those days: 'Time has come for this country to liberate itself from the yoke of the French and to realize Arab unity with the support of the Reich.'<sup>101</sup>

The Vichy-French authorities had reason for their concern. While the nomination of General Henri-Fernand Dentz as High Commissioner improved relations with the Axis, the social and political situation remained explosive.<sup>102</sup> Under intense pressure from the German and Italian governments, Dentz submitted to measures that were to rescind some of the obstacles still blocking Axis activities in the mandates. German support for the return of an Arab nationalist government only added to public opposition encountered by Dentz. By the end of February, the crisis had reached a new level.<sup>103</sup> The continuing blockage of Syria and Lebanon both from the Mediterranean and the eastern Syrian–Iraqi border had resulted in a severe shortage of bread, rice, sugar, and petrol. Nationalist circles in Damascus that were led by Quwwatī called for a strike. Shopkeepers, students, and merchants took up the initiative, and the protests soon spread to other Syrian towns, leading to repeated and violent confrontations with the French army.<sup>104</sup> By March, a similar level of unrest had reached Lebanon, where the *Najjāda* played a major role in the organization of the protests. Pressured by all sides, Dentz submitted in early April to the demands raised by the public. The liberation of political prisoners and the formation of a nationalist government in Damascus under the leadership of Khālīd al-Aẓm – followed by a similar move in Beirut – were clear signs that Arab nationalist politics had resumed its influential force.



For many observers, this agitation from nationalist circles was a direct result of Hentig's visit. The coverage of the strikes by the local German press agencies DNB and Transocean had added to the violence of the protests. Slogans in favour of Hitler and the drawing of swastikas in some Damascene quarters reflected this atmosphere.<sup>105</sup> From a German perspective, however, these protests were highly ambivalent. While Germany saw an interest in nurturing a potential ally, for the time being the stability of France and of the French controlled territories was a guiding objective of German politics in the region.<sup>106</sup> Due to the mounting threat posed by Britain and Free France, the preservation of public order in the mandates remained a priority. For that reason, the Axis powers strongly advised local activists to accept a High Commissioner's offer that would allow for some of the public demands to be realized and bring an end to the strikes. This was the message to an envoy who had been delegated to Beirut for consultations with German officials. For the time being, he was informed, Germany had no interest in a weakening of France's rule. The final state of the mandates could only be determined after the hostilities had ended.<sup>107</sup>

Nevertheless, Hentig favoured an intensification of the German efforts to influence the events in the territories under French control. In a report about his stay that was written in late February following his return to Germany, he strongly appealed for additional steps that would ensure a direct German role. Given the intimidations and reprisals that were levelled by the French authorities against Hentig's Syrian and Lebanese interlocutors and the continuing presence of openly pro-Gaullist and pro-British forces within the French administration, Hentig called on his superiors to take immediate steps. In addition, he suggested the establishment of a formal German representation in the mandates that would supervise the Italian commission.<sup>108</sup>

### *The French mandates and the escalation in Iraq*

Hentig's proposal coincided with an intensification of the debates within the Auswärtige Amt about German strategies vis-à-vis the Arab Middle East. In late January 1941, 'Uthmān Kamāl Ḥaddād had again been delegated to Berlin in an attempt to convince the Axis for substantial support.<sup>109</sup> In a letter to Hitler, Ḥusaynī came back to his call for an explicit declaration with regard to future independence and unity of the Arab states; even more important was a detailed demand for the provision of weapons and financial aid for the Iraqi government. In the light of the German advance in North Africa and the military successes in the eastern Mediterranean, Hentig's suggestions and the latest demands formulated by Ḥusaynī implied a revision of German political and military directions.<sup>110</sup>

As a measure that would ensure the extension of German propaganda and allow for a tight grip on the local political scenery, the idea of an official German delegation to Lebanon and Syria had received substantial support within the higher echelons of the Auswärtige Amt. By mid-April, Hentig himself was nominated as an envoy who would formally be charged to head a sub-commission to the

IAC.<sup>111</sup> The events of the coming weeks, however, made these plans obsolete: the escalating crisis in Iraq was to draw Syria and Lebanon into the war.

The takeover of Rashīd ‘Alī al-Kaylānī in Baghdad on 2 April 1941 gave momentum to German politics in the region. Kaylānī’s putsch had put a group of explicitly pro-Axis actors in power. While Italy and Germany advised the Iraqi regime not to take military measures against British positions, Arab demands for Axis provisions of weapons had now become ever more pressing. On 12 April, the Axis repeated their reservations about a military confrontation, all the while promising the Iraqi government support in case of need.<sup>112</sup> While German military aid for Iraq was in itself a crucial escalation of the German–British confrontation, the use of Syria and Lebanon as a major route for the transport of these weapons obviously crossed red lines. According to British demands, which were repeated on several occasions following the signing of the armistice agreements in June 1940, the use of the Levantine territories against British positions was unacceptable. From a logistics viewpoint, however, no alternative options were available; with all other routes blocked, any provision of weapons would necessarily involve Syrian and Lebanese territory.

By 2 May, the German leadership gave the green light for German military aid to the Iraqi army. The same day, a formal German request to open Syrian airbases for the German Luftwaffe was submitted to the Vichy government. In addition, the request included the provision of arms and equipment of the French Armée du Levant that had been placed under joint Italian–German control following the armistice of June 1940.<sup>113</sup>

From a French perspective, the German request was highly problematic. In fact, it questioned the very future of the French mandates. While Maréchal Pétain had only recently reaffirmed his desire to keep France out of the war, the German demand came close to a call for French collaboration in Germany’s campaign against Britain. Being unaware of Germany’s ultimate intentions in the region, France had to balance the consequences of either decision. Any implication of the mandated territories in attacks against British positions would most probably provoke immediate British reprisals.<sup>114</sup>

France nevertheless submitted to the German request and consented to the selling of three-quarters of French military stocks kept in the mandates.<sup>115</sup> Part of the agreement was the dispatch of a small German delegation that was to prepare – in close coordination with the French authorities – the arrival of the German planes and to ensure the supply of weapons for Iraq. Furthermore, the delegation, which was headed by the German diplomat Rudolf Rahn, was to serve as a sub-commission to the IAC, effectively substituting the envisaged mission that was to be led by Hentig.

### *The mandates as battlefields*

Soon after the arrival of the German delegation in Aleppo on 9 May and an initial encounter between Rahn and the French High Commissioner, the first convoy of weapons left by train for the Iraqi border.<sup>116</sup> On 10 May, the first German planes

landed in Damascus.<sup>117</sup> French cooperation was facilitated by a German offer of wheat, sugar, and rice, which was to be purchased in Iraq and transported to the mandates with the returning trains. Despite such measures, the French concern about British reactions was well founded. Soon after the arrival of German planes, in mid-May, Britain had gained knowledge of the German involvement and the flow of arms over the Syrian–Iraqi border.<sup>118</sup> British attacks on Palmyra and the bombing of bridges that were used for the transports drew the French-controlled territories into the war.

From a German perspective, the continuity of French cooperation and the prevention of a takeover by pro-Gaullist officers had gained ever more importance. The massive anti-German propaganda, which included dropping leaflets by British aeroplanes, posed a serious risk to the loyalty of the French administration. While the German delegation, which included some dozen members of the *Auswärtige Amt* and the *Luftwaffe*, focused on a facilitation of Germany's war efforts in Iraq, the *Abwehr* intensively pursued its networking and coordination with Arab nationalist circles. Based on directives of the *Abwehr*, which was reportedly preparing a supplementary envoy of up to twenty German agents, Roser had taken initial steps to provide weapons to Arab nationalist formations. In close cooperation with Shukrī al-Quwwatī and 'Ādil Arslān, the *Abwehr* prepared for the arrival of a shipload of weapons that were to be distributed among Arab militants for their use against British positions in Palestine.<sup>119</sup> Already by mid-May, plans for a resurrection in Palestine had intensified, provoking repeated calls for arms and equipment that were to be distributed in Damascus.<sup>120</sup> Similar demands were raised with regard to Iraq.

The deteriorating situation in Iraq was carefully noted by the local population. Syrian and Lebanese volunteers arrived at the Iraqi border to join the Iraqi resistance.<sup>121</sup> Neither German military aid, however, nor popular support for the Iraqi rebels significantly improved the perspectives of the Iraqi rebellion. By 31 May, resistance had effectively ceased, with British troops taking control of Baghdad. German personnel and Syrian, Lebanese, and Palestinian fighters prepared their withdrawal. Already one day earlier, Prime Minister Kaylānī and Ḥusaynī had crossed into Iran, where they contacted the German ambassador to coordinate future action.<sup>122</sup> While German planes made brief stopovers on Syrian bases as they left the region, Arab expatriates and larger numbers of members of the Iraqi resistance poured over the Iraqi–Syrian border.

In the past, French High Commissioner Dentz had strongly opposed any arming of local nationalist groups. While their weapons would neither suffice to strengthen substantially the Iraqi nor the Palestinian revolt, he argued, they would ultimately turn into a threat for the French mandates itself. However, Dentz's objection began to fade during these weeks; the mounting urgency to organize the defence of the mandates had softened his position. In the context of German–French negotiations, which had started on 20 May in Paris and had focused on the extent and conditions of a military cooperation between the two countries, the French government had yielded to German demands to adopt a more active role in the ongoing war. While such a concession allowed for a stronger position

in negotiations with the German government, it implied taking sides against Britain.<sup>123</sup> In a related development, by late May Dentz had given up his opposition to the use of armed nationalist circles, and had even agreed to a coordination with Amīn al-Ḥusaynī.<sup>124</sup> This decision paved the way for an intensification of activities that were meant to obstruct any British advance.

On 8 June, British and Free French troops started their offensive against Syria and Lebanon; in their eyes, the assumed presence of German troops justified an immediate and massive intervention. Yet, contrary to the hopes of the Allies, the French authorities in Beirut opted for defence, ultimately bringing the war to the urban centres of the mandates. The advance of Free French and British troops was slow, but the counter-offensives that were initiated by Dentz did nothing to stop their steady advance. Repeated bombings of Beirut, from where most of the civilian population was evacuated, and the fall of Damascus to Allied troops on 21 June were forerunners of defeat.

Part of the war and a result of Dentz's cooperation was the build-up of Arab formations that were to sabotage British positions. A French amnesty of Arab nationalists allowed numerous expatriates to return and to join the anti-Allied resistance.<sup>125</sup> One of those profiting from these revisions of French positions was Fawzī al-Qawuqjī. Leading a group of militants who had actively participated in the Iraqi resistance, by late May he had withdrawn over the Syrian border. His popularity and expertise in warfare had long since attracted the attention of German officials, who considered his participation in battles against an Allied advance as an important asset. In early June, Rahn had approached the French Commissioner to lift the death sentence that since the mid-1920s had prevented Qawuqjī's return.<sup>126</sup> Qawuqjī's support would give anti-Allied resistance a significant push.<sup>127</sup>

Rahn was directly involved in the handling of these affairs. His preparations for the departure of the German community, which had left Beirut for Aleppo soon after the outbreak of hostilities, was paralleled by intensive manoeuvres to ensure the flight of pro-German personalities that in the past had cooperated with the Axis. In a telegram to his superiors, Rahn drew attention to the necessity for arrangements with the Turkish government that would allow these persons' transit to Turkey.<sup>128</sup> Notwithstanding these preparations for a possible retreat, he intensively continued to organize Arab resistance. While a collaborator of Qawuqjī had formed a group of some 500 persons to engage Allied troops in the area of Homs and Palmyra, sheikh Shammar, a Bedouin leader with previous contacts to German officials in Baghdad, had promised 500 to 1,000 additional fighters who were to be deployed alongside Syria's north-eastern border.<sup>129</sup> Similarly, Druze and Kurdish groups were encouraged to join these formations.<sup>130</sup> Contacts were also made with Assyrian leaders for their participation in the resistance.<sup>131</sup>

Despite these arrangements, internal conflicts amongst these groupings posed additional obstacles to Rahn's activities. While 'Ādil al-ʿAẓma was accused by some of embezzling German money, the confusing nomination of several nationalist personalities as representatives of the Arab resistance harmed its organization.<sup>132</sup> Qawuqjī's wounding during a battle on 24 June left his fighters in disarray.

The formal regrouping of the remaining rebels in Aleppo briefly improved the situation – but the war in the mandates had effectively been lost.<sup>133</sup> In the north, these fighters, who were supported by seven German soldiers of the French *Légion Étrangère*, represented the last cover for the Syrian city.

The arrival of numerous Syrian, Lebanese, Palestinian, and Iraqi nationalists in Aleppo who called for German assistance to cross into Turkey clearly highlighted the urgency of an immediate withdrawal of German and pro-German personnel. While some – amongst them the wounded Qawuqjī and his son – were flown out from Aleppo, this option was limited to very few. Despite Rahn's insistence that 'in the interest of future action in the East, German help appears urgently requested',<sup>134</sup> German attempts to provide Turkish entry permits did not produce immediate results. On 10 July, Rahn sent a last request for a German intervention with the Turkish government to allow the transit to Axis-occupied Greece of the remaining 350 fighters of Qawuqjī's group.<sup>135</sup> One day later, Rahn crossed the Turkish border to Alexandretta; the same day, Vichy resistance had effectively ceased.

The arrival of the war in the Levant had caused a sharp deterioration in daily life. Economically, since the imposition of the British blockade over the mandates, prices for daily needs were soaring, with basic goods disappearing from the local markets. Since the 1930s, fears of war and memories of the First World War had influenced the local public; the advent of the battle front pushed these uncertainties to extremes, leaving many in a state of retreat. Despite intense propaganda from German Radio Berlin-Zeesen, the effects on the broader populace were limited. In early 1941, German propaganda remained devoid of any specific promises or broader perspectives. While Radio Berlin-Zeesen had openly called for resistance in Iraq and Palestine, the German position in Syria and Lebanon was different.<sup>136</sup> The prospect of independence, which was used for German propaganda in other parts of the British Empire, risked provoking anti-French activities. Here, the German *Auswärtige Amt* decided to limit its propaganda to calls for 'freedom in a general sense',<sup>137</sup> only vaguely nurturing nationalist expectations.

During the battles of June, thousands of members of the French *Troupes Spéciales*, who were recruited from the local population and served as a backbone for the French defence, deserted.<sup>138</sup> Soon after the start of the hostilities, the Syrian and Lebanese governments had approached the High Commissioner in an attempt to declare Damascus and Beirut 'open towns' – a status that could have spared their densely populated centres from attacks and military manoeuvres.<sup>139</sup> Rahn, who had received knowledge of these requests, strongly opposed any such move. In a personal encounter with two collaborators of the Lebanese president, the German envoy reiterated his refusal and aggressively turned down any attempt to consider popular fears; the High Commissioner would have done better, Rahn argued, had he hanged the Lebanese president for his request, which for him was a sign of defection and cowardice.<sup>140</sup>

## 5 Nazism in retreat

### The fading of an option and the battle for independence (1941–1945)

The occupation of Damascus and Beirut by British and Free French troops and the cessation of hostilities on 14 July 1941 put an end to Vichy rule in the Levant and marked a setback for German influence. Yet traces of National Socialist thought and politics hardly disappeared, even if their context had significantly altered. In the light of the Allied occupation, the ideological premises and strategic considerations that in the past had guided local politics profoundly shifted during the years running up to the end of the war. Persistent conflicts between Free France and Great Britain and the emergence of the Soviet Union and the United States as major political players in the region provided additional options to local actors; the hasty retreat of the diplomatic and military personal of the Axis over the Turkish–Syrian border most visibly symbolized these changes.

The new diversity of potential allies on the international level was paralleled by similar developments in local political life. While several parties that had shaped Syrian and Lebanese politics in the pre-war years now resurfaced in an atmosphere of diminishing repression, new organizations were formed that gave voice to previously marginal or non-existent currents. The appearance of an early Ba‘thist movement and the merging of various Islamist groups into the nucleus of the Muslim Brotherhood were expressions of these transformations. In Lebanon as much as in Syria, new sets of political rifts came to the fore.

Speaking in a broadcast from Cairo on the eve of the joint Free French and British campaign on 8 June 1941, General Catroux had envisaged an end to the mandatory regime: ‘You will therefore from henceforward be sovereign and independent peoples, and you will be able to form yourselves into separate states or to unite into a single state.’<sup>1</sup> The promise of independence and the declaration of an end to the mandate was meant to impress the local public and to mark a rupture with Vichy-French rule. Despite Catroux’s explicit reference to the free choice of both Levantine states to decide their political future, doubts about Free France’s intentions remained omnipresent. In fact, after the successful end to the campaign in the Levant, Free France gave no priority to local esteem; the fortification of French rule in the Levant under de Gaulle’s leadership was primarily a tool to discredit the propaganda of the Axis and to weaken Vichy’s stance at home. In this regard, Great Britain’s position was different. Fearing an increase of German influence in other parts of the region under British control, British

officials considered the realization of basic Arab nationalist demands a necessity to ensure minimal support against the Axis.<sup>2</sup>

Conflicting interests between the Allied powers catalysed local political struggles. The blossoming of political activity was paralleled by an ever livelier quest for normative fundaments of society and politics. These debates increasingly touched on an international dimension as well. Conflicting nationalist visions of the Lebanese and Syrian states in a post-war international order increasingly resonated with the population, immediately affecting the governments' bargaining for international legitimacy.

### **Collaboration in exile, new allies, and the struggles for power**

The Allied offensive in June 1941 forced most Germans to leave the Levantine territories. Many Lebanese and Syrian citizens who in the past had cooperated with the Axis were left with no choice either. Their previous relations with the enemy powers now turned them into potential threats for the stability of the administration. In addition to numerous members of militant groups who had received material support from the Axis and who had actively participated in the fight against the advancing Allied troops, leading representatives of Syrian and Lebanese political circles fled into German protection.

German officials had expressed profound interest in the establishment of networks of Arab activists that would ensure influence in the territories now under Allied control. Amīn al-Ḥusaynī and Rashīd 'Alī al-Kaylānī figured most prominently among those who had attracted German attention; support had also reached several Syrian and Lebanese personalities that were expected to foster pro-German sympathies among the local population. In addition to 'Ādil al-'Azma and his brother Nabīh, two prominent members of a wealthy Damascene family, 'Ādil Arslān was considered part of such networking. No less prominent was Fawzī Qawuqjī. Supported by Munīr al-Rayyis, Qawuqjī continued to act as a leading protagonist of German–Arab cooperation. In addition, Kāmil Murūwa, Rashād al-Barbīr, and 'Afīf Ṭībī were members of these circles that were to serve as a direct link between German and local politics. Such a connection, however, did not imply an easy German–Arab understanding; nor did it reflect an agreed approach pursued by Arab leaders. In addition to the conflict over leadership between Ḥusaynī and Kaylānī, other cracks soon came out into the open.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Refuge and collaboration: Germany, Greece, Turkey***

Following the Allied occupation of the French mandates, Qawuqjī was one of the first Arab personalities to arrive in central Europe.<sup>4</sup> Already prior to his wounding in a battle on 24 June 1941, German officials had taken initial steps to prepare Qawuqjī's possible flight. Qawuqjī's name was mentioned on a list of local personalities that was transmitted by Rahn to the Auswärtige Amt to facilitate their crossing into Turkey. Qawuqjī's wounding sped up these plans; in late June, Qawuqjī was flown out of Aleppo to receive medical treatment in Berlin. He was

accompanied by 'Ādil al-'Aẓma, a former Director General of the Syrian Ministry of Interior under the National Bloc government and a participant in the anti-Allied resistance.<sup>5</sup> Soon after his arrival in Berlin, Fritz Grobba was charged with Qawuqjī's care and with the supervision of his activities. Until November 1941, when Ḥusaynī and Kaylānī joined him in Berlin, Qawuqjī remained the most prominent interlocutor with German officials.

Qawuqjī's arrival in Berlin coincided with Hitler's decision to extend the task of the Sonderstab F to engage Arab nationalist elements for the German cause. The origins of this formation went back to the German military mission in Iraq that had been created on 21 May 1941. One month later, the OKW, the High Command of the Wehrmacht, had ordered the transformation of the mission into an organization that was intended to establish anti-British networks in the Middle East, to collect information for future military action, and to train Arab activists for sabotage operations.<sup>6</sup> Soon afterwards, on 21 September, the formation's assignment was further specified. In addition to its previous tasks, the mixed Arab–German formation was now expected to serve as an experimental unit for tropical regions.<sup>7</sup> Already by mid-July 1941, preparations had begun for the opening of the unit's camp in Cape Sunion in Greece. Of its 200 soldiers and 20 officers in late August, twenty-seven were of Arab origin; while most of them were recruited from students in Germany and France, others had arrived from Turkey. With larger numbers of Arab refugees remaining in Ankara and Istanbul, the strength of the Arab element in the camp was soon expected to reach 200, with many of them having previously operated under Qawuqjī's command.<sup>8</sup>

Qawuqjī was a prime target for Germany's interest; his expertise in warfare and his personal ties made him a sought-after personality. Yet, only a few documents shed any light on the concrete role played by Qawuqjī in these endeavours of late summer 1941, and the conflicting accounts of those involved further add to the difficulties in assessing his activities. Qawuqjī himself recounts various approaches by German officials who had encouraged him to join the German side. Although he submitted detailed reports on military tactics of the Iraqi resistance and on possible German propaganda strategies in the Arab Middle East, according to his own narrative he rejected any formal engagement in the name of the Arab movement.<sup>9</sup> His memoirs paint the picture of a man whose suspicions prevented any trust in the German regime.<sup>10</sup>

Nonetheless, Qawuqjī did not shy away from close cooperation with his hosts. His ties with the expatriate community in Turkey and Arab members of the German camp in Cape Sunion were part of these efforts. According to brief references in a German report of late September, Qawuqjī's role included the provision of information related to the developments in Syria and Iraq. Furthermore, Qawuqjī was expected to influence local personalities according to German directives, with the Auswärtige Amt, the Sonderstab F, and the Abwehr directly profiting from his activities.<sup>11</sup> Results were soon to materialize: by early August, the Sonderstab F had drawn up concrete plans to sabotage the local infrastructure in Tripoli and Palmyra.<sup>12</sup>



Such cooperation is confirmed in the memoirs of Munīr al-Rayyis, a fervent nationalist from Damascus and one of Qawuqjī's collaborators in the Iraqi revolt and resistance in the Vichy-controlled territories. Rayyis had fled Aleppo in early July to Athens on board a German plane, and from there travelled to Berlin to join Qawuqjī.<sup>13</sup> Shortly afterwards, he was dispatched to Greece to oversee the Arab soldiers and to serve as a liaison between the German military leadership in Athens and Qawuqjī back in Berlin.<sup>14</sup> He leaves no doubts about his close involvement in the camp's organization. Yet, in a striking parallel to Qawuqjī's account, Rayyis takes pains to emphasize his reluctance to submit to German authority. While he does not hide his cooperation with the Wehrmacht and his willingness to adapt to the strategies pursued by the German regime, his account focuses on existing tensions in his relations with the German side.

With the arrival of Ḥusaynī and Kaylānī in Berlin in November 1941, Qawuqjī and Rayyis were increasingly sidelined. Being trapped in Tehran following their flight from Baghdad, Ḥusaynī and Kaylānī had remained in close contact with German officials. In the light of a possible British and Soviet offensive against Iran in summer 1941, measures were taken to ensure their escape. While Kaylānī managed to cross into Turkey, Ḥusaynī was forced to take refuge in the Japanese embassy in Tehran, from where he finally escaped to Rome. Kaylānī's arrival in Istanbul by late summer intensified the consultations that had started earlier amongst the exiled Arab activists in Turkey. It had increasingly become clear that coordination was necessary to define the framework of future cooperation with the Axis and to balance the different and often conflicting priorities.

Retrospective accounts of these debates, however, disagree on the positions adopted by the participants. Kāmil Murūwa, for instance, who had fled Beirut in early June, recounts in his memoirs various meetings that brought together the expatriate community in Istanbul. According to Murūwa, the group consented to a strategy that reflected a shared commitment to a *jihād* for the Arab cause – a *jihād* that was to be pursued without taking either side of the Allied or Axis camps now at war. Independence of the Arab nation was the goal agreed on that was to be strived for individually and collectively, both inside and outside the Arab world.<sup>15</sup> While Murūwa's retrospective narrative suggests a non-partisan approach to both sides of the global conflict, contemporary sources contradict such a description. An exchange of letters between 'Ādil al-'Azma and Qawuqjī in autumn 1941 reveals far more details, and clearly links Arab expectations with the Axis.<sup>16</sup> In a letter addressed to Qawuqjī in Berlin, 'Azma mentions several meetings in Istanbul in September that had brought together Kaylānī, 'Ādil Arslān, the Palestinians Akram Zu'aytir, 'Izzat Darwaza, Wāṣif Kamāl and others. Discussing Arab demands directed at Germany in future negotiations, Berlin was explicitly considered a potential ally.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the prominent role played by Kaylānī in these consultations, Ḥusaynī was the first to arrive in Italy, from where he proceeded to Berlin on 6 November.<sup>18</sup> Ḥusaynī had met in Rome with Mussolini and the Italian Foreign Minister Ciano, urging an explicit declaration in favour of Arab independence. In the light of recent French and British statements in support of Syrian and Lebanese

ambitions, an Axis vow to support Arab unity and independence had become ever more pressing.

Due to potential conflicts with Italian, Turkish, and French interests in the region, the *Auswärtige Amt* had long remained reluctant to tie itself to any explicit statement regarding the prospective order of the Arab world.<sup>19</sup> Italy's consent in principle to Arab demands, which had become discernible during Ḥusaynī's meetings in Rome, altered some of these concerns on the German side. Following his journey to Berlin, Ḥusaynī intensified his efforts in meetings with German officials, focusing on the shared enemies, which both Germany and the Arab world were supposedly facing.

It took more than five months until the German and Italian government finally consented to an exchange of letters that would outline Axis–Arab relations.<sup>20</sup> In their letters to Ḥusaynī and Kaylānī of April 1942, the German and Italian foreign ministers submitted to Arab demands for support and recognition and voiced opposition to the idea of a Jewish national home in Palestine. Yet, the propaganda effect on Arab nationalist circles again fell short of what was expected. The statement did nothing to alleviate persisting doubts on the Arab side.

What was worse, the relations between Kaylānī and Ḥusaynī deteriorated significantly during these months, further obstructing a unified Arab stand. Conflicts between Ḥusaynī and Kaylānī, and also between Ḥusaynī and Qawuqjī, were partly due to concurring personal ambitions; they were further aggravated by substantial differences in strategy and political expectations nurtured by the respective sides. German plans, for instance, which envisioned the use of the Arab unit of the *Wehrmacht* in future offensives towards Iraq, went counter to Ḥusaynī's ambitions to direct the Arab soldiers against Egypt, and from there to Palestine.<sup>21</sup>

These conflicts increasingly risked harming Arab nationalist strategies and goals, with opposition to the Arab leaders in Berlin mounting among nationalist circles in Turkey. Notwithstanding the various obstacles, contacts between the communities in Berlin and Istanbul were facilitated through German diplomatic missions. These communications, which involved the 'Aẓma-brothers and 'Ādil Arslān in Istanbul, and Ḥusaynī, Kaylānī, and Qawuqjī in Berlin, reveal the tensions in these circles.<sup>22</sup> In the month following the arrival of Ḥusaynī and Kaylānī in Berlin, the Arab community in Turkey had not remained idle; it had itself maintained close contacts with local representatives of the Axis. With only sporadic and at times contradictory news arriving from Berlin and Rome, doubts about German and, in particular, Italian ambitions had become ever more apparent. Personal encounters with German officials in Turkey only added to the ambivalent impression of the German side.<sup>23</sup> As a consequence 'Ādil Arslān and 'Ādil al-'Aẓma explicitly turned down requests that had called for their personal participation in the ongoing negotiations in Berlin.<sup>24</sup>

Despite consistent attempts to play down the remaining obstacles in the negotiations, by early 1942 signs of distrust and open rebellion against the Arab representatives in Berlin came to the fore. In a letter to Ḥusaynī on 20 April 1942, Nabīh al-'Aẓma candidly pointed out the failure of Ḥusaynī's efforts: in spite of the lengthy consultations that had already started during the Iraqi rebellion,

neither Germany nor Italy had taken any unequivocal measures in support of Arab independence. In fact, the outcome of the negotiations had triggered fears that such relations with the Axis would result in ‘a supplementation of a foreigner with another foreigner, of a yoke with another yoke.’<sup>25</sup> Such fears were based on concrete misgivings about the Axis ambitions. In his letter, ‘Aẓma explicitly asked:

[What] about the extent and meaning of the German *Lebensraum* principle, how does it relate to the Arab countries? [What is] the form, [what are] the limits and relations of [Mussolini’s] principle to re-establish the glory of Rome in the Arab countries?<sup>26</sup>

This concern was shared by others; in a letter to Ḥusaynī, ‘Ādil Arslān had voiced similar fears and objections.<sup>27</sup>

While these conflicts were known to most of the Arab leadership, the Axis propaganda tended to paint the image of a successful cooperation. Since late November 1941, the work of Radio Athens that was coordinated by the Sonderstab F had received additional resources to broaden its outreach. While ‘Afif Ṭībī had joined the station’s staff to improve its work, speeches on air by Ḥusaynī, Kaylānī, Qawuqjī, Sa‘īd Fattāḥ al-Imām, and Rayyis added to its radiance.<sup>28</sup> In early summer 1942, these measures were further stepped up. As part of these efforts to gain the upper hand in the struggles over Arab public opinion, Kāmil Murūwa was delegated to Sofia where he was to monitor the Arab press for exploitation in Axis propaganda.<sup>29</sup>

French officials indeed considered this propaganda successful. Rumours about the formation of an expatriate community in Istanbul and of a military unit in Greece under the command of Munīr al-Rayyis had soon spread to the Levant.<sup>30</sup> In addition to speeches of Arab leaders in exile that were broadcast on Radio Athens, news about German military successes and calls for public unrest against pro-Allied local leaders attracted public attention.<sup>31</sup> According to French sources, these efforts were coordinated by a German official of the press department who was cooperating with Jamīl Kana‘an, a former representative in Damascus of the German consulate general. With offices of this network in Istanbul, Adana, and Alexandretta, which were reportedly staffed with Lebanese and Syrian journalists, the service was seen as directly linking the exiled community with Arab nationalist circles in Syria and Lebanon.<sup>32</sup>

### ***Local reactions to the Axis’s retreat***

Despite the rapid establishment of Allied control, the political order in the mandates was anything but stable. While the defeat of Vichy in Syria and Lebanon had sidelined German influence, the German offensive against Russia and the advance of the Wehrmacht in North Africa gave rise to rumours of a renewed attack on the region. Public reactions to the Allied forces were thus cautious; neither the French declaration of independence nor its public confirmation by Great Britain convinced the public that independence was at hand. In Lebanon, enthusiasm

was limited to long-standing pro-French Christian circles. Notwithstanding the momentary calm, the prospect of local political arrangements was far from predictable; similarly, the regional order was all but ensured.<sup>33</sup>

An exchange of letters between General de Gaulle and Captain Lyttelton in late July and early August formally framed the French–British split of responsibilities in the occupied territories, with Free France obtaining responsibilities for civil administration and internal affairs. As a liaison between the Free French and the British government, the British General Edward Spears was delegated to Beirut. In spite of an initial agreement of the two allies, the significance of both Syria and Lebanon within British strategic considerations prevented any strict separation of internal and external affairs. Local moves in the mandates inevitably risked calling the broader regional balance into question.<sup>34</sup>

By late September, when Free France had again declared its general preparedness to grant independence, expectations had further diminished. Notwithstanding the restoration of the Syrian constitution and the replacement of the Vichy-chosen directorate, these measures were hardly perceived as leading to an end of the mandate. For many, the naming of Tāj al-Dīn al-Ḥasanī as president of the Syrian republic only symbolized France's intentions to restore the pre-war order. Not only did the French-imposed government lack any relevant nationalist elements; what was worse, French control over the army and police persisted. With regard to Lebanon, progress was even less forthcoming. On 26 November, General Catroux made a declaration that did not exceed the limits set for Syria. Local reactions to such scarcely concealed distraction from independence were uncompromising.<sup>35</sup>

As fast as sympathies were fading even among France's traditional allies, suspicions within the French administration about British ambitions increased. British influence was ever more perceived as an essential threat to French positions. Rumours soon spread of British attempts to win over nationalist groups which in the past had proven hostile to France. On various occasions, the French security apparatus noted with concern the reorientation of several outspoken 'enemies of France', who had previously served as collaborators of the Axis and were now tempted by British overtures.<sup>36</sup>

In addition, rumours persisted about pro-German networks that were re-forming in nationalist circles. Reports about manoeuvres within the Lebanese Muslim community to advance Salāḥ 'Uthmān Bayhum and Sāmī al-Ṣulḥ – two personalities known for their previous contacts with the German regime – as possible replacements for a French-chosen prime minister highlighted the continuing threat of pro-Axis networks.<sup>37</sup> Real or assumed members of these networks were identified not only in the capitals Damascus and Beirut, but also in many other towns and provinces, involving representatives of different political currents and sects.<sup>38</sup> While the activities of German agents in Turkey were closely followed, the efforts to trace local activities were equally intense.<sup>39</sup> News about the arrival of larger numbers of German officials in the Alexandretta region and massive propaganda pursued by Radio Athens and Radio Berlin-Zeesen noticeably aggravated concerns of possible acts of sabotage and popular rebellion. Based on information

reported on German radio stations, French officials assumed that a significant network of informants was already in place.<sup>40</sup>

By late 1941, such fears led to the imposition of severe measures against pro-German activities. In the light of past attempts by German agents to cross into the mandates, the struggle against infiltration was central to the Allies' efforts. The strategy of deterrence was underlined by executions of known supporters of the Axis.<sup>41</sup> Reacting to reports about German paratroopers who had intruded into Syria, the French administration decided to offer rewards for information about their whereabouts. In addition, strict punishment was imposed on those villages that had provided cover for German agents.<sup>42</sup>

Despite tight controls on cross-border relations, contacts between nationalists in the mandates and their counterparts in Turkey remained intact. Facing major decisions about the future stance towards France and Britain, nationalist leaders Shukrī Quwwatlı and Hāshim al-Atāsī strove for close coordination with the leaders in Turkish exile.<sup>43</sup> For Quwwatlı in particular, who was considered a confidante of Amīn al-Ḥusaynī, connections with pro-German circles in Turkey turned out to be a valuable asset. Despite his own past contacts with German officials, he had personally refrained from gestures that would have placed him unchangeably on either side of the global conflict. His decision to remain in Syria in the wake of the Allied occupation – despite the risk of internment – only multiplied his options, and ultimately allowed for his shift of allegiance to the British camp over the coming years.<sup>44</sup> The French administration, however, had serious doubts about Quwwatlı's intentions. In the light of the latest reports of secret meetings between Quwwatlı and pro-German local activists, during which he reportedly defended alliances with Germany, Quwwatlı was considered an important figure of the Axis's fifth column.<sup>45</sup>

Continuities within the pro-German networks, which dated back to the times of the Vichy government, were also noted in other circles. While such links often reflected individual views and ambitions, in other cases relations went far beyond the personal level. The early Islamic populist movement of the Muslim Youth, for one, was internally split about the appropriate strategy. Having emerged in the late 1930s as one of many associations aiming at providing religious services, the grouping had gradually turned its Islamic vision into an ever more explicit political programme. Already during the troubles of early 1941, the Muslim Youth had joined the political battles in which it had opted for German support.<sup>46</sup> Given the new circumstances and the scarcely concealed French–British disagreements about how to pursue the path towards independence, French intelligence noted an evolving division in the organization's partisanship that was due to different stances towards the new ruling powers. While a significant part of the wider movement did not exclude negotiations with the British if essential nationalist demands were met, a second current, led by Sāmī al-Ṣulḥ, the Beirut president of the Criminal Court, vehemently defended the German option; for Ṣulḥ, whose contacts with German agents dated back to autumn 1940, negotiations with the Allies were out of question.<sup>47</sup>

The case of the Syrian Nationalist Party was similar. The party's activities had noticeably diminished following a military trial of some of its most prominent members in August 1940; the political opening of summer 1941 nevertheless encouraged several cells to take up political agitation. Although past repression had significantly harmed its organizational structure, by late September 1941 a declaration was published in the name of the party that was explicitly meant to mark its reformation. According to the statement, which was supposedly approved by the party's higher council, a new 'moderate front' had recently been formed within its ranks. The internal 'coup' was intended 'to purify the Syrian Nationalist Party from its corrupt and destructive elements'<sup>48</sup> and to clarify its aims and principles. Central to the statement, which was distributed as a leaflet, was a refutation of pro-Axis links assumed to have been entertained by the party. Referring to Anṭūn Sa'āda, the statement emphasized the authentic, non-Fascist and non-Nazi character of the movement, and cautioned its supporters against any possible influence by German and Italian propaganda.

While the background of the announcement remains unclear, French reports left no doubt that this line was not followed by all of its members; several incidents were noted from within different party branches that revealed the persistence of strong pro-German sympathies. Although such sympathies did not take the form of concrete relations with representatives of the Axis, French officials carefully watched over the party's propaganda.<sup>49</sup> One of these measures included the establishment of files of pro-German party members who were to be interned in case of future public unrest.<sup>50</sup> Yet, stability of the local order was not the only concern. In March 1942, the Lebanese police drew attention to pro-German tracts that were disseminated by an SNP cell in the Lebanese village Bayt al-Shabāb – an incident that was regarded as a significant economic problem as well. According to the local police, the village depended considerably on Jewish tourists who in the past had spent their summer holidays in the region and would possibly move to other regions in the future due to the pro-German activities of local SNP members. Measures against the party, the report implied, were thus urgently required.<sup>51</sup>

Internal fragmentation, which obstructed a unified stance imposed from above, noticeably shaped the strategies adopted by radical Arab nationalist circles as well. Although this spectrum shared a pan-Arab outlook and self-perception as a youthful avant-garde of the nation, it remained organizationally split into diverse groupings and formations – to the dismay of the French security apparatus and local opponents, whose attempts to trace the organizations' structures and to identify their protagonists often ended up in confusion. Acting under different names, numerous pan-Arab circles re-emerged in the urban centres. While their names showed many similarities, the continuity of these organizations with their nationalist predecessors was often far from established.

One of them, the League of National Action, was quick to reorganize. While the League was significantly weakened by the repressions following the outbreak of the war, several of its leaders had escaped internment and were now rebuilding the party structure. Already by December 1941, the authorities had noted the organization's resurgent activities and its attempts at coordination with pan-Arab

activists in Turkey. According to the Sûreté Générale, the League's branch in Aleppo served as a major hub for these contacts.<sup>52</sup> Focusing on explicit propaganda in favour of Amīn al-Ḥusaynī and collecting information about collaborators with the Allies, the League reportedly coordinated with the exiled leaders and their German interlocutors.<sup>53</sup>

### ***Organizing antifascist opposition***

The persistent rejection of French and British rule among the wider public was a striking feature of Lebanese and Syrian societies during these years of the Second World War. Frustrations with French and British policies and distrust over their ambitions and goals had affected even the most articulate critics of the Axis. In May 1941, at the height of the British offensive in Iraq, the Marxist intellectual and leading member of the League against Nazism and Fascism in Syria and Lebanon, Raʿīf Khūrī, offered an insight into the fragility of pro-Allied commitment. In an epilogue to his book *Signposts of National Consciousness*, he levelled a furious attack against the continuing British obstruction of Iraqi independence. Reflecting the popularity of the Kaylānī-led resistance not only in Iraq, but in the neighbouring countries as well, Khūrī praised the new Iraqi government for having taken a 'position at the people's side'.<sup>54</sup> Khūrī further justified his defence of the revolt by suggesting that Kaylānī had taken a neutral stance in the global confrontation between the Axis and the Allies. Such a position also echoed in the clandestine newspaper *Niḍāl al-Shab* that was distributed in the mandates during the months of Vichy rule.

For these circles, the German attack against Soviet Russia on 21 June 1941 turned things upside down. While Germany entered into war with the USSR, the Allies had taken Damascus the very same day.<sup>55</sup> By early July, communist leaders Khālid Bakdāsh and Rafīq Riḍā thus turned to French General Catroux to voice their support for the Allied forces and to declare their wish to join their struggle against the fascist regimes.<sup>56</sup>

While fears of communism persisted among the authorities, the Free French administration agreed to free most members of the Communist Party who had been imprisoned in the Lebanese Prison des Sables since the beginning of the war. This decision was to pave the way for an immediate reorganization of the party under the leadership of Khālid Bakdāsh and Faraj Allāh al-Ḥilū.<sup>57</sup> By August, the first tracts were published, reproducing speeches and declarations by Soviet personalities.<sup>58</sup> In November, a brochure entitled *Syria and Lebanon and the Current War* that was jointly written by Bakdāsh and Ḥilū summarized the strategic setting in which the communist struggle was placed: it was the defeat of Fascist and National Socialist rule that would ultimately allow the economic crisis and political repression in Lebanon and Syria to be overcome. The central paradigm according to which 'the fate of Syria and Lebanon is bound to the fate of war'<sup>59</sup> was not limited to questions of national independence and political freedoms, but was meant to address the economic situation as well. This position was formally adopted during the General National Council of the party in November 1941.<sup>60</sup> In its final declaration, the Council stated:

The whole world must know that the Arabs are on the side of the Soviet Union, they are on the side of the French people fighting for the liberation of their nation from the Nazi yoke, on the side of the British and American masses, on the side of all peoples of the world fighting against the barbarism of Hitler. They are on the side of freedom and light.<sup>61</sup>

The republication of the party's newspaper *Ṣawt al-Sha'b* in January 1942 gave this position an important forum; as a core topic of communist agitation, the call for antifascist opposition was central to the newspaper's editorial line. While the newspaper was officially licensed, the party still lacked formal recognition; from the viewpoint of the French administration, activities of the party appeared increasingly welcome. Following a request made by Bakdāsh to authorize a function on the occasion of 1 May intended to support the Allies, the director of the French Sûreté Générale even considered 'discreetly supporting'<sup>62</sup> the organizers.

As in pre-war years, the encouragement of antifascist opposition was an essential part of communist politics. The noticeable moderation of its economic and political programme facilitated the promotion of its antifascist calls among a broader public.<sup>63</sup> The dissolution of the Comintern in May 1943 further added to the party's outreach. Freed from its bonds to the international umbrella organization, the party's standing as a national party had significantly improved.<sup>64</sup>

The attraction of other social and political currents strongly contributed to the spread of antifascist thought and to the creation of awareness for the continuing necessities of the struggle against the German regime. Similarly to the communists, who were shaken by the German attack on the USSR, the Armenian population of Lebanon and Syria showed clear signs of anxiety.<sup>65</sup> Fearing a German assault against the Soviet republic of Armenia, the League for the Defence of Armenia that was formed in September drew considerable support from the Armenian population.<sup>66</sup> The League was backed by the Armenian organizations *Hintchak* and *Ramgavar*, and was soon said to regroup several thousand supporters.<sup>67</sup> During various public rallies in Beirut, Damascus, and Aleppo, the League did not refrain from addressing serious problems within the Armenian community itself, e.g. the struggle over the 'control of the churches'<sup>68</sup> with the Armenian organization *Tashnak*. In the past, the radical nationalist organization had collaborated with agents of the Axis, illustrating once again the receptivity for Fascist and National Socialist thought amongst diverse local currents. Despite such a split in the community, the League's cause was encouraged by many. On 9 November 1941, according to the organizers, over 3,000 people participated in a conference held in Beirut in support of the Allies and the Armenian resistance against the German advance.<sup>69</sup>

The League against Nazism and Fascism in Syria and Lebanon was closely involved in these activities of the CP and the League for the Defence of Armenia. In October 1941, members of the pre-war formation met to rebuild the organization and to take up its activities.<sup>70</sup> With 'Umar Fakhūrī, Kāmil 'Ayyād, Yūsuf Yazbik, and Ra'īf Khūrī, the League again represented some of the most prominent intellectuals of Marxist and socialist orientation. Reflecting the need to



mobilize public opinion and to confront the impact of fascist propaganda, one of the League's first decisions included the creation of a journal to inform the public about the ideological context of the war. The first edition of the magazine *al-Ṭarīq* was released on 20 December, its cover showing a man smashing a huge swastika with an axe.<sup>71</sup> The vision of the journal echoed its precursor, *al-Ṭalīa*, that had been calling for cooperation of a broader political spectrum in the antifascist struggle.<sup>72</sup> The goal of a unified front clearly shaped the journal's content; authors such as Ra'īf Khūrī and Waṣfī al-Bannī set out to highlight an assumed contradiction between nationalist and National Socialist thought. Frequent reports about the events of the war and articles by the prominent Soviet author Ilya Ehrenburg added to the argument forwarded by the journal's editors: although the front-line was distant, the war was not; in a global confrontation between two antagonist regimes, it was impossible to sit idle.

To popularize these views, the League took an active part in local political debates. On various occasions, functions were organized to comment on outstanding events of the war and to trace their relevance for the local context. Facilitated by the creation of a women's branch of the League, which was prominently represented by Maqbūla al-Shalq, and two other organizations, the League of Democratic Arab Students and the Association of the Friends of the Soviet Union, the League managed to reach a broader audience not only in the urban centres, but also in provincial towns such as Zahle and Marja'yun.<sup>73</sup>

While antifascist opposition did not necessarily imply explicit support for the Allies, the French administration had no choice but to co-opt these currents. In late 1943, the nomination of 'Umar Fakhūrī, a leading member of the antifascist League, as director of Arab broadcasting of French-controlled Radio Levant illustrated the pragmatic approach adopted by the French administration. Supported by a commission that included Ra'īf Khūrī, Fakhūrī, who had run as a CP candidate for the parliamentary election in August 1943, was charged with supervising and coordinating the radio programmes; though his political outlook remained suspect, his resolute antifascist orientation was a valuable asset to counter Axis propaganda.<sup>74</sup>

### *Local elections and the turn of the war*

In the light of mounting frustration amongst the local population, France was in apparent need of any voices that were able to counter the influence of the Axis. By the turn of 1942–43, a continuation of past French politics had become untenable. The German defeats in al-'Alamayn in November 1942 and in Stalingrad in January 1943 were perceived as major turning points of the war. While the Wehrmacht was in retreat in Eastern Europe, Operation Torch – the British and US-led invasion of North Africa in November 1942 – had pushed Axis troops back from their last bastion in Tunisia. The coverage of these developments was extensive in the local Arab press. The landing of the Allies in Sicily and the following dismissal of Mussolini on 25 July 1943 only furthered the fading influence of both European Axis powers. Given these events, the chances of a future German takeover were slim.<sup>75</sup> While manoeuvres of the German Abwehr continued to bother the French security

apparatus, most of the German missions were aimed at information gathering that could help derail possible Allied offensives against the Balkans. With the local Italian espionage network in a state of dissolution, a French report about Axis activities in the territories in September 1943 noted the apparent abandonment of the Axis's fifth column.<sup>76</sup>

At the international level, other developments contributed to the mood of a new era and gave additional momentum to calls for elections and independence. The entry of the USA as a political actor in the Middle East, furthered by the Atlantic Charter in August 1941, echoed growing economic interest in the region. Despite substantial support for the Zionist movement, US interventions into regional politics were not necessarily perceived as a threat. Since the USA was not discredited by past colonial ambitions, the appointment of a Consul General to the Lebanese and Syrian governments in 1942 provided a potential trigger in future bargains with France.<sup>77</sup>

Given the changing regional settings, France's control over the territories and its rejection of speeding up the path towards independence was difficult to uphold. Throughout the second half of 1942, Britain repeatedly pushed for steps that would loosen France's grip on the mandates. Facing additional pressures as a result of the continuing economic crises in Lebanon and Syria, with inflation, low incomes and food shortages fuelling public protests, first signs of a possible shift of policies became discernible in early 1943. Following a public statement by Catroux on 23 January about his intention to re-establish the constitutional regime, first steps were taken by late March. In Lebanon, elections to the parliament and the presidency were envisaged, ultimately allowing the restoration of the Lebanese 1926 constitution. Elections in Lebanon were scheduled for August; in Syria, where President Tāj al-Dīn al-Hasanī had died in January, elections were announced for July.

Yet, French hopes that these measures would assure French control over local politics were soon frustrated. In Syria, as in Lebanon, clear victories in the elections were carried off by long-standing opponents of French rule. Following intensive negotiations to appease the persisting disputes between the various branches of the National Bloc, Shukrī Quwwatlī had managed to put in line the Bloc's leading representatives and prepared the ground for the Bloc's success. Quwwatlī's election as president of the Syrian republic and the nomination of a reputed National Bloc-led cabinet illustrated the mounting popular resistance against any further hold-up of a transfer of power. In Lebanon, the outcome of the elections proved even more challenging to the existing French-dominated order.<sup>78</sup>

Following the elections to the Lebanese parliament in late August and early September the political bargaining to determine a candidate for presidency ended in a set-back for French ambitions. With the Sunni-Muslim Riyāḍ al-Şulḥ and the Maronite Bishāra al-Khūrī agreeing on Khūrī's nomination for presidency, two factions had joined forces that in the past had proven hostile to French domination. The 'National Pact', as this agreement between Khūrī and Şulḥ became known, marked a significant departure from the previous political order. While the agreement set out new mechanisms for the internal division of power, it was equally

crucial to questions related to the regional order. Joining ranks in a shared struggle for independence, these leaders of two major constituencies pushed for essential changes of the new government's handling of foreign relations. By 8 November, the decision of the Lebanese parliament to amend the constitution according to recommendations suggested by the Ṣulḥ-led government provoked one of the deepest crises in the history of French mandate rule. Encouraged by recent negotiations in Cairo among Arab leaders about the Arab regional order, the Lebanese government had called for a unilateral termination of the mandate. The parliament's vote to suppress all articles in the constitution that were in conflict with full independence marked the beginning of an open conflict. In the light of the parliament's decision, French Delegate General Jean Helleu called for an immediate revision of the changes made to the constitution. President Khūrī, Prime Minister Ṣulḥ, and several members of the cabinet were arrested, the parliament dissolved, the constitutional amendments revoked, and a new president appointed.<sup>79</sup>

Popular reaction was unprecedented. All major political currents joined forces in protest at the move; in addition to members of the directly affected parties, members of the Phalangists, the *Najjāda*, the Communist Party and even high-ranking representatives of the Maronite church openly defied the French actions.<sup>80</sup> The declaration of a general strike and the organization of massive public protests in Lebanon soon echoed in other Arab countries as well. Tense demonstrations were reported from several Arab capitals. In the light of the rapidly deteriorating situation, General Spears convinced the British Foreign Office to take urgent steps to prevent further escalation. In an unparalleled move, General Catroux, who had been reappointed to the Levant as a replacement for the hastily withdrawn Helleu, was presented with a British ultimatum that called for a reinstallation of the government and the president by 22 November. Catroux submitted to these pressures, although a simple revision of Helleu's measures of early November was insufficient to calm down persisting tensions. On 22 December, Catroux finally consented to a Franco–Syrian–Lebanese tripartite agreement, laying out the transfer of power to the Lebanese and Syrian governments.<sup>81</sup>

In the light of recent developments, locally as well as internationally, the European powers had forfeited what was left of their persuasiveness among the public. Given the retreat of Nazism, no argument existed that could have given legitimacy to the continuation of quasi-colonial rule.

### **The search for a post-colonial order: the rise of ideology-guided politics and the German defeat**

The events of late 1943 proved crucial for the future of the two Levantine societies; this was true not only with regard to the formation of the governments and the tripartite agreement, both of which marked major institutional steps towards independence. The events were equally important for the internal struggles about the prospect of society in an independent state. The transfer of powers, which progressively expanded from a formal takeover of 'Common Interests' to include all administrative fields, changed the popular perception of the government. In the

past, state bodies had long been perceived as instruments of French control; now, political institutions potentially allowed the expression of popular will. Political battles thus ever more transcended informal politics and gradually involved state institutions as well. Far from acting as extensions of mandate rule, government and parliament were challenged to define and direct state policies according to public opinion and demands. Referring to these ruptures of late 1943, Elizabeth Thompson pointedly speaks of a ‘referendum on the postcolonial civic order’.<sup>82</sup>

The persisting confrontation with Nazism, yet again, touched on crucial questions that had come out into the open. An MA thesis entitled *The Doctrine of National Socialism. A preliminary study* that was submitted in July 1944 to the American University of Beirut illustrates the persistence of Nazism as a point of reference in local discussions. In his conclusion, the author clearly draws on the local context:

[The] contradiction between Führerstaat and Rechtsstaat does not mean that the Führerprinzip is, even in theory, arbitrary rule. The real enemy of Democracy is Demagogy, and not leadership. It is Demagogy when Parliamentarians, eager for power, forget their duties, and instead of leading the people, are led by them. The danger of Dictatorship is egocentrism, when the ‘Führer’ tend to concentrate all powers in their hands, refusing any advice and crushing any criticism. Both Parliamentarianism and Führerprinzip have their good and bad aspects. Nevertheless, it is to the credit of the Nazi thinkers to have contributed to Political Thought in finding out a reply to the Anglo-Saxon Parliamentarianism and this in opposing to popular sovereignty, political personalism. It is now definitively granted that the aim of the State is the well-being of the people. In order to reach this aim, two methods are proposed: the Anglo-Saxon Parliamentarianism and the Nazi Political Personalism. The latter School will run a brilliant career on the condition that Nazism should be rid of some ugly practices to which the Nazi State uses to have recourse to carry through its measures.<sup>83</sup>

While for some, Nazism remained a source of inspiration, for others, it was the negation of their own political vision. Political struggles had ever more been marked by a phenomenon that came to transform the political scenery: the rise of popular ideology-guided movements. Similarly to the Syrian Nationalist Party and the Communist Party, the pan-Arab Ba‘th Party and Islamic populist organizations now entered into battle over political functions and influence that were not primarily fought for personal benefits.<sup>84</sup> Distinct *Weltanschauungen* had gradually – and with ever more sophistication – been developed in the various intellectual magazines and cultural clubs; now, on the eve of independence, the political context allowed these ideological outlooks to be turned into explicit political missions.

### ***Ba‘thism and the implementation of the ‘eternal Arab message’***

The formation of the Ba‘th Party was an example for this development; while its intellectual roots went back to the 1930s, the organization itself was formed in the

years leading up to the end of the Second World War. The emergence of Ba‘thism was closely tied to the activities of Mīshāl ‘Aflaq and Zākī al-Arsūzī. In 1941, the circles that had gathered around them, finally merged into a unified organization.<sup>85</sup> ‘Aflaq and Arsūzī shared the experience of extended studies in Paris and a strong dedication to their profession as teachers. Arsūzī was born into an Alawite family from the Alexandretta region, which by 1938 had been ceded to Turkey, forcing Arsūzī to depart for Damascus. Already by 1933, Arsūzī had joined the League of National Action, whose members came from a similar social and intellectual background. As the League’s representative in the Sanjak, his opposition against the Turkish ambitions in the region had gained him considerable acclaim.<sup>86</sup> As a core question of local politics in the 1930s, the conflict over Alexandretta was an important catalyst for the radicalization of the pan-Arab nationalist movement – and for Arsūzī as well.

The path of ‘Aflaq was different. Following his return from a four-year stay in Paris, where ‘Aflaq had met his future collaborator, Salāḥ al-Dīn al-Biṭār, he had started in 1932 to work as a history teacher at the *Tahjīz* school in Damascus. As for many of his colleagues during these years, his position as a teacher provided him with an audience for the development of his ideas and political ambitions. In addition to his professional work as an educator, ‘Aflaq soon began to contribute to various journals, among them the left-leaning magazines *al-Duhūr* and *al-Ṭalī‘a*.<sup>87</sup> His contacts with the French Communist Party now helped him to gain access to local Marxist and socialist currents. Despite such contacts, ‘Aflaq was neither a member of the Communist Party, nor did he take an active role in its activities.<sup>88</sup> While the Alexandretta crisis had facilitated Arsūzī’s interest in political action, it was the rebellion led by Kaylānī in Iraq that provided a similar stimulus to ‘Aflaq. He made a first step towards political activism in early 1941, when ‘Aflaq – supported by Salāḥ al-Dīn Biṭār – set out to organize support for the Iraqi revolt. Reflecting the popular mood in favour of anti-British resistance, the so-called ‘Support for Iraq’ network added to ‘Aflaq’s popularity.<sup>89</sup> Now, with nationalist fervour at a new height, their grouping merged with circles around Arsūzī, creating the nucleus of what would later turn into the Ba‘th Party. As a charismatic leader, who had been raised in the popular Damascene Maydan quarter, ‘Aflaq drew much support from the urban youth that had increasingly distanced itself from the traditional political organizations and personalities. ‘Aflaq’s candidature for the parliamentary elections in summer 1943 marked the first explicit bid for political power. Although this bid ultimately failed, public attention was considerable, echoing the mounting interest for the group’s activities.

The origins of the grouping go back to the Vichy period; yet, no relations with officials of the Axis are documented. While Sāmī al-Jundī, an early member of Arsūzī’s circle, recounts an attempt by Sa‘ādī Kaylānī, a collaborator of the Axis, to approach Arsūzī for cooperation on behalf of the Italian Armistice Commission in March 1941, there is no evidence that any substantial ties existed.<sup>90</sup> From an ideological perspective, this was not self-evident. Referring back to the time of the early 1940s, Jundī explicitly highlights a then widespread belief in German invincibility that persisted in these circles.<sup>91</sup> This was true in a military sense,

but also, ideologically, Germany was still regarded with profound fascination. Nietzsche's *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation*, and the racial theories developed by H. S. Chamberlain in *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* were among the works consumed by these young intellectuals. According to Jundī,

[they] were the first who thought about translating [Hitler's] *Mein Kampf*. Whoever has lived through this period in Damascus will have noticed the inclination of the Arab people towards Nazism. Nazism was the force that took revenge for them. The defeated naturally admire the victorious. We, however, were of a different school.<sup>92</sup>

Despite Jundī's insistence that Ba'ithism was indeed a 'different school', Nazism obviously figured prominently in these circles' reflections on society, history, and culture. Although neither Arsūzī nor 'Aflaq explicitly introduced National Socialist ideologists in their writings, Jundī's account illustrates the topicality of Nazism as an intellectual point of reference. In this context, two facets of early Ba'thist ideology are important. While the elaboration of Ba'ithism was still in its initial beginnings, already in the writings of the early 1940s two central ideas are discernible: the idea of an 'eternal message' (*al-risāla al-khālida*) attributed to the Arab nation and the construction of communism as the ultimate negation of national thought. Both facets are related to each other, as well as to the very concept of nationalism that was further developed in post-war Ba'thist reflections.<sup>93</sup>

The idea of an 'eternal message' expressing the authentic and essential core of the Arab nation was central to both ideologists of the party. Despite important differences that distinguished Arsūzī's understanding from 'Aflaq's, both shared a metaphysical concept of the nation. While Arsūzī had developed his theory of a divinity of the Arabic language in his early book *The Arab Genius in its Tongue* in 1943, the core texts of 'Aflaq's thought were published in the years following the end of the Second World War.<sup>94</sup> Even in his brief texts available from the early 1940s, however, 'Aflaq's claim of an 'eternal message' was already laid out.<sup>95</sup> For him, the message of the Arab nation was based in its spiritual particularities; it was directed not only at the Arab nation itself, but was instead perceived as a revelation-like message transgressing the limits of the national community.<sup>96</sup> In one of the key texts of this period that was written on the occasion of Prophet Muḥammad's anniversary, 'Aflaq outlined basic elements of this claim. Arab nationalism, here, was closely tied to the deeds of Muḥammad. While discounting Islamic theology as a system of faith, for 'Aflaq, the life of Muḥammad bore particular importance for the Arab nation: 'The life of the prophet represents the Arab soul in its absolute truth.'<sup>97</sup> Such explicit references to Islamic history did not imply an Islamization of Arab nationalism in a religious sense. Instead, the message of Islam, personified by Muḥammad, was reinterpreted as a worldly mission endowed to the Arab nation.<sup>98</sup>

This said, communism was identified by ‘Aflaq as the major threat to the nation. While the local Communist Party posed a direct challenge to Ba‘thist influence amongst young and educated circles, it was communism as a *Weltanschauung* that was perceived as the ultimate antagonist to the very essence of Arabism. In a lengthy pamphlet published by ‘Aflaq and Biṭār in June 1944, the organization’s stance towards communism was laid out. Recounting their early fascination for thinkers such as André Gide and Roman Rolland, ‘Aflaq and Biṭār retraced their relations with communism throughout the 1930s.<sup>99</sup> According to this account, it was through a reading of German philosophical thought that their initial fascination for socialism faded. In retrospective, German philosophy

was the correction for the influence of materialist philosophy on us. It protected us against the deceptions of the abstract thought on which socialism is based, and which is the negation of the fundamentals of nationalism.<sup>100</sup>

Such an idealistic turn inspired by German thinkers was discernible in the Ba‘thist metaphysical definition of the Arab nation. Arabism, from this point of view, contained an unchangeable core: ‘[T]here can only by one Arab thought throughout history.’<sup>101</sup>

Despite a lack of explicit references to National Socialist sources, these writings resonated with tropes that were attributed to National Socialist thought. Considering the assumption of a particular and eternal message, in the early sources of Ba‘thism, traces of essentialist imaginations of a superior Arab nation can already be identified. Even more so, the Ba‘thist perception of communism as an anti-national *Weltanschauung* symbolizing the threats to the community noticeably paralleled National Socialist anti-communist agitation.

### *Islamic populism and the struggle for morality*

The struggle against communism as a threat to the social order was equally central to the rising current of Islamic populism. Since the 1930s, local Islamic societies had been created in Lebanese and, in particular, in Syrian towns. Although the development of these organizations echoed similar trends in Egypt, the formation of the local Muslim Brotherhood was not directly linked to its Egyptian counterpart.<sup>102</sup> While personal links to the Egyptian brotherhood existed, the growing resonance of this current in Lebanon and Syria reflected local conditions that had facilitated the formulation of an Islamist political agenda. In the light of increasing liberties under Free French and British control, Islamist groupings that in the past had remained fragmented now took to the streets. Questions of educational reforms and opposition to public demonstrations by the women’s movement provided opportunities of often violent interventions.

Despite their increasingly distinct ideological claims, Islamic societies such as the Society for Islamic Civilization (*Jam‘iyyat al-Tamaddun al-Islāmī*) and the Youth of Muḥammad (*Shabāb Muḥammad*) were often related to mainstream political movements; personal and organizational ties to nationalist parties such

as the National Bloc and the League of National Action were no exceptions.<sup>103</sup> In this, the movement resembled its counterparts in Egypt and Palestine, with Palestinian Mufti Amīn al-Ḥusaynī most strikingly symbolizing the persistent bonds linking the pan-Arab and emerging Islamist spectrum.

In reports of the French security apparatus, early Islamist organizations were frequently described as ‘xenophobic’ and ‘Germanophile’.<sup>104</sup> Based on vague information about contacts with German officials that were reportedly entertained by members of these currents during the times of Vichy rule, the French authorities feared the existence of substantial ties linking these groupings to the Axis. Focusing on such contacts and the organization’s fervent opposition to France’s rule, French assessments tended to emphasize this current’s ever more active role in regional and international bargaining.<sup>105</sup> In addition to contacts with the Axis, strategic alliances with other international players were not precluded. The French authorities thus noted with concern the sporadic approaches to British and US representatives in the region, who – despite their support for Zionist ambitions in Palestine – appeared as potential levers to undermine French influence in the region.<sup>106</sup>

Ideologically, Islamic populism explicitly refrained from references to ‘foreign’ sources. French observations of xenophobia as a major trait of these groupings were not only due to hostile attitudes towards the French administration and its rule; instead, these groupings perceived the struggle against the ‘foreign’ as such as a requirement for the preservation of society – its structures, traditions, and morals. Referring to the agitation of Islamic populists, Elizabeth Thompson tellingly observes that ‘ousting the French was only the beginning of a process of purging society from foreign, and even indigenous Christian, influence. They envisioned the postcolonial state as an instrument of return to a perceived past of untroubled tradition’.<sup>107</sup>

From an Islamist perspective, communism was also identified as a most pressing threat. The strong public presence of the Communist Party had on various occasions since 1943 provoked violent attacks by Islamist circles; depicting communists as ‘enemies of God’,<sup>108</sup> anti-communist agitation was supplemented by Islamist demands for a strengthening of religion as a cornerstone of society.<sup>109</sup> Education and the promotion of Islamic values was the key to these battles; even more important was the preservation of family structures and gender relations. Touching central pillars of the social and political order, these questions turned into battlefields that opposed communist, Islamist and nationalist currents of various colourings. In these battles, early Islamist groupings defended an assumed collective of the Islamic *umma* against the ongoing transformations that were increasingly challenging the traditional order. In June 1945, the leader of the Youth of Muḥammad in Homs, Muṣṭafā Sibā’ī, who had been interned by French authorities from 1941 to 1943 in the camp of Miyya Miyya in Lebanon, finally provided one of the first detailed ideological outlines for this current.<sup>110</sup> Already prior to his founding of the Muslim Brotherhood in Damascus, Sibā’ī had stressed the importance of Islam as the guiding principle penetrating all aspects of life.



***Democracy and national independence***

While the struggle for the collective that was led by Baʿthist and Islamist currents called for the submission of the individual to the interests of the community, relevant sections of the local public anxiously questioned the implied negation of individual rights. Given the persistent threat posed by authoritarian regimes – and notwithstanding profound concerns about the Allies’ ambitions – for many, the Allies appeared as guarantors of basic political liberties and rights. In 1942, the editor of the Beirut daily *al-Nahār*, Jibrān Tuwaynī, published a small booklet containing several statements of leading local personalities that left no room for any doubt as to which side was to be taken in the ongoing war. Entitled *The Arabs and the Allies. Why are we with them and what do we expect from their victory?* the publication was introduced by Tuwaynī as a sharp critique of Nazi politics and ideology:

The fate of the Arab countries is tied to the fate of the Allies. If they win – and they will win, God willing – there will be [enough] place for hopes that independence can be achieved. If they do not win – God forbid – we will lose all hope for independence. We do not say that the Allies granted ‘every’ right to the Arabs; but they granted a larger part of these rights, and they provided them with the perspective that they can achieve everything they call for. In contrast, the Germans deny the very foundations of these rights, as the Arab race is – according to their view – one of the inferior races that does not enjoy the right to live. The Arabs are thus siding with the Allies out of sympathy and interest.<sup>111</sup>

In addition to the Mufti of the Lebanese Republic, Sheikh Muḥammad Tawfīq Khālīd, and the Patriarch of Antakiyya, Iskanderus Tahan, leading Lebanese and Syrian political figures contributed brief statements explaining the reasons for their siding with the Allies. Bishāra al-Khūrī, Riyāḍ al-Ṣulḥ, ‘Umar al-Dā‘wuq, Salīm Taqlā, Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Nuṣūlī, ‘Abdallāh Bayhum, Luṭfī al-Ḥaffār, Bahj al-Khatīb, and Muṣṭafā Abū ‘Izz al-Dīn were amongst those whose statements were reproduced.

Strikingly, not all of these personalities had in the past shown as consistent an opposition against the Nazi German regime. Tuwaynī best symbolized existing ambivalences that had shaped Syrian and Lebanese views and actions. Having himself been in contact with German officials since the late 1930s, Tuwaynī’s critique of Nazi repressions against political opponents had not obstructed sympathy for Nazi German hostilities towards Jews.

With Germany on the retreat and independence from French rule appearing ever more realistic, Nazism increasingly lost appeal. The decline of Nazism as a potential point of reference became also visible in the monthly journal *al-Adīb*. Published in Beirut by Albert Adib, the journal gave a forum to a broad spectrum of intellectuals. Tuwaynī, again, was one of these authors. Writing in the first number of the journal in January 1942 about the necessity to support the

democratic states against dictatorship, Tuwaynī justified his call for democratic rule with long-standing ties linking Arab civilization to democratic ideals.<sup>112</sup>

Such a depiction of democracy as the core of Arab heritage was not new; while this image had in the past often been used in confrontations with the mandate power, the defence of democracy as an authentic tradition had increasingly gained importance as an argument in inner-Arab controversies as well. Despite significant ideological differences that shaped contributions to the journal *al-Adīb* – with authors ranging from Qusṭanṭīn Zurayq and Edmond Rabbath to Iliyās Abū Shabka, Qadrī Qalaʿajī, ʿUmar Fakhūrī and Raʿīf Khūrī – the contributors shared an unspoken agreement about the importance of individual rights as a cornerstone to the future civic order.

In addition to detailed discussions of the totalitarian and racist foundations of Nazism, the journal provided substantial arguments in defence of humanism and human rights.<sup>113</sup> Discussing the prospects of national education, for instance, the director of secondary education at the Syrian Ministry of Education, Jamīl Ṣalība, explicitly highlighted the need to focus on individual rights:

The democratic states want the perfection of the individual to be the goal of education and civilization, while the dictatorial states want to place the collective at the centre of culture and education. ... Schools in democracies want to be independent from politics so that they can raise the individual on the principles of freedom, equality and fraternity, to prepare the individual for human life in all its aspects, accustom it with [the principle of] free long-ing [for knowledge], discussion and criticism. ... Democracy, humanism and liberty are the general principles on which we must build our national education. Every Arab national education that is not based on these principles will lead to extinction, as it does not fit to the genius of the Arab nation, with its past and future.<sup>114</sup>

Not surprisingly, Ṣalība was a major target of Islamist campaigns against Christian officials in Damascus.<sup>115</sup>

The Beirut journal *al-Ṭarīq* shared many of these views. Yet, as an outlet of the League against Nazism and Fascism in Syria and Lebanon, its ideological outlook was much more determined. In addition to extensive refutations of basic premises of National Socialist ideology, the journal pushed for debates about the very principles of democratic and parliamentary rule.<sup>116</sup> The defence of the ideas of liberty, equality, and fraternity was not limited to a critique of Nazism and Fascism as a European phenomenon, but explicitly meant to confront anti-democratic and anti-liberal forces at home. Several contributions were dedicated to local debates and disputes. Commenting, for instance, on articles published by the renowned liberal Egyptian intellectuals Ṭaha Ḥusayn and ʿAbbās Maḥmūd al-ʿAqqād, Khālīd Bakdāsh, and Waṣfī al-Bannī vehemently challenged their views on democracy and political representation. While Ḥusayn and ʿAqqād came out against the authoritarian practises of the German regime, their criticism – it was argued – failed to notice the very limits of liberal parliamentary rule itself.<sup>117</sup>

Accusing Ḥusayn and ‘Aqqād of an elitist approach to democracy, Bakdāsh pointedly declared that ‘democracy does not mean “to rule to the satisfaction of those who are ruled”. [Instead,] democracy *is* the rule of the people.’<sup>118</sup>

Other contributions in the name of a struggle against Nazism were equally provocative. Nazism, several women writers claimed, was not only expansionist towards the outside and repressive against internal opposition; in addition, it represented an extreme form of male domination of society. In consequence, representatives of the women’s movement considered that the struggle against Nazism – this *jihad* for humanism and emancipation<sup>119</sup> – was to be fought at home as well.<sup>120</sup>

Even more uncompromising was the opposition articulated by these circles against the re-emerging influence of the Syrian Nationalist Party. Since the offensive of the Allies in summer 1941, the SNP had attempted to convince the new authorities of its moderation and to legalize its status.<sup>121</sup> For most observers, the decision of the Lebanese government in June 1944 to authorize the party came as a surprise, provoking an enormous public response. While the journal *al-Ṭarīq* drew attention to the persistent fascination for the party amongst intellectuals, the communist daily *Ṣawt al-Sha‘b* launched a massive attack against ‘Hitler’s henchmen in Lebanon’.<sup>122</sup> In the light of the recent landing of Allied forces in France, the decision appeared even more scandalous. In an open letter to the Lebanese Prime Minister, the head of the Lebanese Communist Party Faraj Allāh al-Ḥilū declared:

At a moment when the peoples [of the world] are engaged in a merciless battle against Fascism, the opportunities given to Hitler’s agents and servants provoke a general condemnation by the population, without any distinctions according to social class and political orientation.<sup>123</sup>

### **The international arena: Arab unity, the Atlantic Charter, and the struggle against Zionism**

These controversies were closely tied to negotiations over an integration of Syria and Lebanon into the prospective post-war regional order. Foreign political questions directly touched on concepts of national identity and on future orientations of the state. While Arab nationalists favoured close cooperation among Arab states as a step towards Arab unity, proponents of a distinct *Libanité* interpreted these plans as running against the very essence of their national narrative.

With France’s control over foreign politics of the two states fast diminishing, Lebanese and Syrian politicians abruptly faced the challenge to relocate their strategies and goals in a swiftly transforming regional and international setting. The ongoing negotiations over the project of Arab unity, which had gained momentum with talks between Egyptian Prime Minister Muṣṭafā al-Naḥḥās and his Iraqi counterpart Nūrī al-Sa‘īd in July–August 1943, were of particular importance. The success of a nationalist government in Damascus and the mounting willingness of the new Lebanese leadership to cooperate with Lebanon’s Arab neighbours paved the way for more active participation of both states in regional arrangements.

No less crucial was the stance towards the Allied nations and the project initiated by the Atlantic Charter of August 1941. On 20 March 1944, Gabriel al-Murr, a deputy from Mount Lebanon had submitted a motion to the Lebanese parliament that was meant to initiate a debate about the strategic positioning of the state vis-à-vis the changing international alliances and fronts. The initiative stood for an evolving desire to integrate into the emerging post-war order; it called for a declaration of war against the two remaining states of the Axis, Germany and Japan, the establishment of diplomatic relations with the USSR and the adhesion to the Atlantic Charter.<sup>124</sup> The move, however, only met with reluctant support.<sup>125</sup>

While the public closely followed Allied successes in Europe, reactions to the Allied advance in France were not necessarily enthusiastic.<sup>126</sup> The strengthening of Free France in Europe significantly increased the pressures on the local governments. In summer 1944, for instance, coinciding with the liberation of major parts of France from German occupation, Free France drew back from negotiations about the *Troupes Spéciales* in the mandates.<sup>127</sup> As an indigenous armed force still under French control, the troops were an instrument to maintain order and were perceived as an important symbol for independence and sovereign rule. France's retraction from negotiations with the Syrian government at a time of major successes against Germany added to doubts about French willingness to cede authority.

Notwithstanding the fading of Germany's reputation, the Nazi regime was not entirely excluded from such political considerations and bargaining. According to French sources, members of the Arab community in Turkey continued to discourage politicians in Damascus from engagements with the Allies. If they were to cooperate with Britain and France, these politicians were reportedly threatened, information about previous relations with the Axis would be revealed.<sup>128</sup> Such revelations risked embarrassing many who were now considered for high-ranking positions in the Lebanese and Syrian administrations.

Despite the general decline of Axis influence, the French *Sûreté Générale* carefully monitored pro-German affinities in the public. Remarks made by Prime Minister Şulh in January 1944 about a possible German–British alliance, for instance, were noted with concern; the nomination of Aḥmad Mukhtār al-Şulh for the position of the *Chef d'Etat* Major of a future Lebanese Army was another reason for unease. His long-standing relations with German officials, which went back to Ottoman times but had regained intensity under Vichy rule, illustrated the persistence of the German factor.<sup>129</sup>

French fears were equally fuelled by relations that risked being forged between Arab nationalists and British or US officials. While several such links had become known, Free French officials garnered hopes that these relations would not last long; both Allies were expected to lose sympathies due to their continuing support for the Zionist movement – a fact that was thought to encourage Arab nationalists to opt for the French side.<sup>130</sup>

The creation of the Union of Lebanese Parties for the Fight against Zionism in August 1944, which was co-headed by the president of the Islamic Bloc, Muḥammad Jamīl Bayhum, and the president of the League against Nazism and

Fascism in Syria and Lebanon, Anṭūn Thābit, revealed the prominence of the anti-Zionist struggle in public opinion. While important parts of the Christian leadership in Lebanon remained favourable to a Zionist settlement in the region, the Palestine question had been a central rallying point for Arab nationalist and Islamist agitation.<sup>131</sup> The anti-Zionist Union thus represented a broad spectrum of parties and organizations, ranging from the Communist Party and the women's movement to the Phalangists and the *Najjāda*.<sup>132</sup> Syrian public opinion was equally hostile to the Zionist project. In this context, US President Franklin Roosevelt's repeated declarations in favour of a Jewish state in Palestine were identified by French observers as a major source for the recurrence of pro-German sentiments.<sup>133</sup>

Yet, with ever more information being available about the German massacres of Jews, anti-Jewish agitators increasingly cost legitimacy in the international arena. Detailed news about the situation of the Jews in German-occupied Eastern Europe had reached the local public from early 1944 onwards. In addition to reports about the catastrophic conditions in concentration camps, local newspapers noted the systematic extermination of the Jewish population.<sup>134</sup> Members of anti-Zionist circles therefore tended more and more to distance their opposition to Zionism from German anti-Jewish persecutions. Reflecting on the news from Europe in an editorial for the Beirut daily *al-Anṣār*, Imīl Zaydān insisted that his warning

of a 'Zionist' threat is in no contradiction to [an expression of] empathy for the Jews in Europe and to deeply mourn their sufferings from persecutions and deportations. We have to differentiate clearly between these two things, so that we can declare without any ambiguity: the Jewish problem is not the Zionist problem!<sup>135</sup>

The same argument echoed in communist agitation as well.<sup>136</sup> Support for the Palestinian-Arab population and the denunciation of Zionism as an imperialist project was central to numerous demonstrations and protests; the struggle against Zionism increasingly emerged as a key topic of communist agitation. The communist newspaper *Ṣawt al-Sha'b* contributed dozens of editorials meant to highlight the imminent threat of the Zionist movement. Here again, the authors tended to differentiate between the plight of the European Jews and Zionist ambitions:

Zionism, in essence, was never about rescuing the Jews from Fascist and Nazi persecutions, as it is claimed by its sympathizers and supporters. If this were the case, if those behind the Balfour declaration and the supporters of Zionism in America really cared to rescue the Jews from persecutions, they would open the gates of America and England, for instance – since within just one year, these two countries could accommodate ... from world Jewry what Palestine could not accommodate within dozens.<sup>137</sup>

Such statements reflected the desire to defend the Arab stance in the coming international negotiations over the post-war regional order. Larger parts of the local

public had initially voiced support for the Atlantic Charter, which came to foster the hopes for a new international system. Yet, enthusiasm for the Charter's insistence on national independence and sovereignty was soon shaken. With US and British policies towards Palestine drawing vehement criticism among the Syrian and Lebanese public, the reputation of the envisaged international organization as a neutral body that would help guarantee the rights of small nations was soon placed in doubt.<sup>138</sup>

In early 1945, with the announcement of the San Francisco Conference about the post-war international order, which was scheduled for April, these debates attained renewed urgency.<sup>139</sup> Given the significance of the conference as a forum for the solution of territorial disputes deriving from the war and the colonial era, Syrian and Lebanese participation would bolster the claims to independence. Although the Allied states had remained vague about the preconditions that were to be met by the participating states, membership of the United Nations and a declaration of war against the Axis was considered crucial. While the initial motion for a declaration of war, which had been submitted to the Lebanese parliament in March 1944, had not born any concrete results, the San Francisco Conference again encouraged taking up such a position. In the light of the deadline that was finally fixed by the Allies as of 1 March, the Lebanese and Syrian governments rushed to meet the set conditions. On 26 February, the Syrian government asked for the parliament's support for a declaration of war against the Axis; while several deputies questioned the move, a large majority approved the declaration.<sup>140</sup> One day later, on 27 February, the Lebanese government submitted a similar motion to the chamber. Addressing the deputies, the Prime Minister 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Karāmā offered an insight into local perceptions of the changing context of the international order: in his view, Lebanon had long since joined the 'fight between the democratic principles and the forces of tyranny',<sup>141</sup> and had in fact paid a heavy price – economically as well as in human lives – in its struggle against the Axis. Lebanon, according to his point of view, had since the beginning of the fighting been in a state of war with the Axis powers.

Karāmā's declaration received unanimous support by the chamber. Since summer 1942, several local journals had drawn attention to the participation of soldiers of Lebanese and Syrian origin in the Allies' armies. In the ranks of the French, American, Canadian or Australian troops, these soldiers' contributions to the struggles in North Africa had been noted with a scarcely concealed sense of pride.<sup>142</sup> Yet, the decision to declare war did not provoke any noticeable reaction from the wider public. Given the pressure that was due to the deadline for participation in San Francisco, the declaration was not necessarily perceived as an authentic statement.<sup>143</sup> In fact, the process itself in which the decision was taken revealed the degree of haste that had guided the government's position. Nearly one year after deputy Murr had drawn the parliament's attention to the lack of any formal constitutional regulations for a declaration of war, the Lebanese government now felt obliged to improvise. While the government demanded the parliament's approval, the president of the republic, Bishāra al-Khūrī, who was recovering in Palestine from a serious illness, was passed over in this procedure; there was no time to wait for his return.<sup>144</sup>

Despite serious concerns about the constitutionality of proceeding in this way, when it transpired in March that both Levantine states would finally be allowed to participate at the San Francisco Conference, the Lebanese and Syrian governments had scored a major diplomatic success.<sup>145</sup> Drawing on the historical parallel of the conference of Versailles in 1919, the invitation provided hope that the Arab world would now be spared the frustrations of the First World War. An editorial for the Damascene daily *al-Kifāh* made this optimism explicit. It is to be hoped, the author declared,

that the San Francisco Conference will gather in a different atmosphere than the one in Versailles. [It is to be hoped] that this conference will open the doors to the Arabs, and will tell them: enter in peace and participate – without any limitations and without any conditions – in its work. Sit on the table as an equal to the great and small states. From this day on, there will be no arbitrary rule [by outside powers], no monopolization of power, no preference [to any state], and no competition. The smallest states will have the same rights as the largest ones, and both have the same right in negotiations and votes.<sup>146</sup>

In spring 1945, such views reflected the developments in Syria and Lebanon themselves. In the light of ever expanding responsibilities that had to be adopted by local institutions and local politicians, the political situation in both countries proved relatively stable. Despite considerable conflicts that had confronted the various and often antagonistic currents and organizations, neither of them were able to dominate or monopolize the political decisions. Intellectually, the situation was similar. While radical nationalist ideologies of various shades were paralleled by Islamic populism as strong popular forces that were calling for a revival of imagined communities of the past, the implementation of social and political rights was at the centre of other currents eager to push for internal reform and international integration. In this context, the option of Nazi Germany as a potential partner and point of reference gradually disappeared. Although Arab nationalist circles continued to collaborate in exile, Germany had lost much of its attraction. The declaration of war against Germany and Japan and the eagerness to participate at the San Francisco Conference symbolized these transformations. While there was no room for enthusiasm, major sections of the public considered international integration of both countries as worth a try; such integration, it was argued, could ensure national independence, but would advance social and political progress in Syria and Lebanon as well.

## 6 The Levant in May 1945

### The defeat of Nazism and hopes for independence

News of the Soviet Army's encirclement of Berlin had reached the Levantine public in the early evening of 24 April 1945. Soon afterwards, large crowds took to the streets. People gathered spontaneously in Beirut and in other Lebanese and Syrian cities. The following day, the communist newspaper *Ṣawt al-Shaʿb* captured the atmosphere in a report from Beirut:

The national songs, hymns, and shrills of joy, the slogans that were raised by women and men during these demonstrations yesterday night resounded in the sky of the capital with the ringing bells of the churches from all quarters of the city. They turned into one melody, overwhelming the souls with electrified enthusiasm and deep joy. The faces, the faces of the popular crowds that had gathered on Martyrs Square and in its surroundings, the faces of these boys and girls – these children of life that had gathered around large torches – were marked with happiness. From everywhere slogans could be heard calling for the life of a Lebanon free and independent, for the life of the Red Army and its great leader Stalin, and for the life of the Allied armies.<sup>1</sup>

Two weeks later the atmosphere had changed. While relief about the end of war persisted, concern over the local situation soon took hold of public opinion. In the first week of May, several events provided stages for public agitation. In addition to Communist Party demonstrations on 1 May, Christian Eastern Orthodox celebrations on 4–6 May witnessed declarations in support of France and the Allies.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, on the occasion of Martyrs' Day on 6 May in Damascus, several parties organized an anti-government demonstration.<sup>3</sup>

These activities related to the ongoing events in Europe; they no less symbolized mounting unease about the overdue results of the local governments. Tensions were particularly growing between the Communist Party and Muslim populist circles. In reaction to recent mass mobilizations of the Communist Party, which had attracted thousands of supporters, the Youth of Muḥammad set out on violent protests that were meant to push back communist influences among the public.<sup>4</sup> News from Paris further escalated the already tense situation. On the evening of 6 May, French Radio Brazzaville had announced the conclusion of a meeting in Paris between General de Gaulle and General Beynet, the French Delegate



General in Beirut, who had left for Paris in early March to receive instructions for negotiations with the local governments. According to the announcement, Beynet was informed that the prospective negotiations with Syria and Lebanon should aim at concluding treaties that would regulate the transfer of power, while ensuring French interest in the region.<sup>5</sup>

From a local perspective, such an insistence on French interests was an affront. Since the turn of the year, French relations with Syria were tense. French reluctance to transfer the *Troupes Spéciales* to local control had marked public opinion; for weeks, student demonstrations in Damascus, Aleppo, and Dayr al-Zur had called for an immediate handing-over of the troops.<sup>6</sup> For the time being, these troops were a persistent symbol of French domination. In this context and coinciding with the announcement of the meeting between de Gaulle and Beynet in Paris, new French troops were to arrive in Beirut. While the French authorities tried to depict these troops as mere replacements, their numbers considerably exceeded those who were to be withdrawn.<sup>7</sup>

The festivities in Beirut and Damascus that were organized on the occasion of the capitulation of the German Wehrmacht on 8 May were overshadowed by these developments. The French delegation had envisaged these festivities lasting for several days. Celebrations, however, were not limited to the French side; the Syrian and the Lebanese governments had planned to join in as well. In a speech held on 9 May, Lebanese President Bishāra al-Khūrī declared his intention to turn the day of the German defeat in Europe into a national holiday:

The day of victory, which we are celebrating today, marks the outset of a world that is worthy of the sacrifices offered by the peoples, worthy of the pains suffered by the nations – a world ruled by freedom, security and justice. We are joining those who are working to achieve this, for we all are responsible for the fate of humanity, before God and before history.<sup>8</sup>

Despite relief about the end of war, many statements revealed profound anxiety about the future, and although the festivities had begun in a calm atmosphere, tensions soon mounted.<sup>9</sup> Various reports of the French *Sûreté Générale* noted the different stances shown by Christian and Muslim populations. According to these reports, Christian quarters were covered with French flags and pictures of General de Gaulle, while similar signs of support for France could rarely be seen in Muslim neighbourhoods.<sup>10</sup> Yet, support for France and its Allies did not immediately follow sectarian lines – and neither did opposition. For many of France's critics of various denominations, the French claim to be on the winners' side of the war was hardly tenable. The larger section of the French population that was now celebrating the defeat of Nazism had previously submitted to Vichy-rule, it was argued, and the liberation of France was not achieved by its own forces, but with the substantial help of its allies.<sup>11</sup>

The ostentatious celebrations thus risked being perceived as a provocation. In Damascus, the Syrian government intervened to stop the flying of French flags; small parades that were led by French and pro-French sympathizers were

attacked by supporters of the Syrian Minister of Interior, Ṣabrī al-Aslī, shouting anti-French slogans and, according to one report, voicing support for Hitler.<sup>12</sup> In Lebanon, the situation was no less tense. The festivities organized by the French authorities coincided with controversial debates by local politicians about how to challenge recent French decisions taken vis-à-vis the country. On 9 and 10 May, several incidents occurred in Beirut in which French soldiers were attacked. One of the most serious of these clashes involved several members of a Palestinian contingent of the British army that was stationed south of Beirut. Joined by local anti-French protesters – supposedly ‘Hitler’s former clientele’<sup>13</sup> – these soldiers had on 10 May escorted a march through downtown Beirut, tearing down French flags and attacking Lebanese policemen. Similar clashes had erupted a day earlier when Palestinian soldiers paraded under a portrait of Palestinian Mufti Amīn al-Ḥusaynī and a flag bearing a swastika.<sup>14</sup> According to reports of the French Sûreté Générale, proof was available that British elements and the Lebanese nationalist politician Riyāḍ al-Ṣulḥ were involved in these incidents. While the Palestinian soldiers had reportedly been paid by British sources to provoke trouble, Ṣulḥ was suspected of having instructed and furnished them with the portrait of Ḥusaynī.<sup>15</sup> In the light of recent news of Ḥusaynī’s arrest in Switzerland and his deportation to France on 7 May, expressions of support for Ḥusaynī, whose collaboration with the Axis was common knowledge, was an easy way to provoke French reaction.

Notwithstanding the already strained situation, tensions were to mount even further during the next few weeks. On 14 May, during a demonstration following the declaration of a strike at local schools, some 1,500 students attacked several French institutions in Damascus, and even attempted to force their way into the Soviet consulate.<sup>16</sup> The same day, the Syrian parliament adopted – with only one deputy objecting – the Law for the Protection of Independence. The law, which was initiated by Akram Ḥūrānī, declared illegal any appeal to religious, racial, or sectarian sentiments that could harm national unity. In addition, the law provided the death penalty for any disturbance of public order in the interests of a foreign power.<sup>17</sup>

The return of General Beynet from Paris on 12 May hardly allowed any appeasement of public opinion. Only a few days later, on 17 May, another reinforcement of French soldiers was reported from Beirut. Following a meeting on 18 May between Beynet and the Lebanese and Syrian foreign ministers Henri Pharaon and Jamīl Mardam, the situation escalated into an open conflict. A French *aide memoire* that was presented to the two ministers showed no sign of compromise. While France considered Syria and Lebanon independent, French privileges had to be guaranteed by the conclusion of treaties that reflected French cultural, economic, and strategic interests. Once these treaties were concluded, France would agree to a transfer of the Troupes Spéciales to local authority. However, these troops would remain under French high command as long as ‘the circumstances do not allow an unrestricted national command [by the Syrian and Lebanese governments].’<sup>18</sup> Both Mardam and Pharaon rejected outright any negotiation on this basis. In a meeting between the two heads of states, Bishāra al-Khūrī and

Shukrī Quwwatī on 19 May, both governments agreed to opt for a path of confrontation. In a joint statement, France was held responsible for the failure of negotiations.<sup>19</sup>

Calls for a revolt against France soon surfaced. Already on 17 May, a pamphlet written by the Ba'ṯh Party had called for a rebellion.<sup>20</sup> In a telegram to Mardam of 22 May, the Iraqi government offered 10,000 rifles that were to be used in a potential conflict.<sup>21</sup> For the moment, however, the Syrian and Lebanese government tried to resist mounting pressures from the parliament and public opinion by calling on the British, US and Soviet representatives to intervene and help ensure the independence of both states. Reports from various parts of Syria were alarming. While French tanks and armoured cars were patrolling the streets of Damascus and Aleppo, strikes, demonstrations, and attacks against French soldiers and civilians were reported from other parts of the country. Although the situation was calm in Lebanon, the Lebanese government repeatedly declared its solidarity and threatened to join the rebellion.<sup>22</sup> Since 19 May, the French air force had been ordered to intimidate the population – according to British reports, these intimidations included low-altitude flights over mosques during prayer times.<sup>23</sup> On 26 May, the first attacks were launched by the French air force against Hama and Dayr al-Zur. One day later, battles erupted in several Syrian cities. Armed with rifles and supported by the Syrian gendarmerie, groups of protesters were engaged in violent confrontations. French attacks against the parliament and the Sérail in Damascus coincided with massive air strikes that came to a height during 29 and 30 May. While the Syrian authorities were effectively forced to abandon their posts, it was an ultimatum imposed by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill on French forces that ultimately ended the battles.<sup>24</sup> On 1 June, the British army began taking up positions in Damascus to push for a ceasefire and to oversee the retreat of French forces into the barracks. On the French side, more than 30 soldiers had been killed; on the Syrian side, estimates ranged between 400 and 2,000 victims.<sup>25</sup>

The violent showdown in Syria in late May 1945 ended French control over the two countries. While the conflict itself resembled the crisis in Lebanon in November 1943, the international context had again changed. The USSR had recognized both countries in July 1944, followed by the United States in September. Lebanon's and Syria's membership of the Arab League, which was formed in March 1945, and even more importantly their joining the UN Conference on International Organization in San Francisco in April 1945 had significantly improved their international standing. On 8 July, France finally declared its willingness to hand over the command of the *Troupes Spéciales*. Similar agreements were soon reached about remaining issues, including French control over communication facilities and infrastructure. However, the key question of a withdrawal of the French army persisted, leading the Syrian and Lebanese governments in early February 1946 to submit the question to the Security Council of the United Nations. As the war against Germany and Japan had ended – so the Syrian and Lebanese delegations insisted – the continuing presence of the French and British soldiers in Syria and Lebanon was in contradiction to the UN Charter.<sup>26</sup> Although a US-sponsored compromise ultimately

failed, France and Britain finally expressed willingness to resume negotiations with the two Levantine governments.<sup>27</sup> In early March, France and Britain agreed to complete withdrawal from Syria by the end of April at the latest. With regard to Lebanon, the Lebanese government accepted a deadline of 31 August. Both deadlines were respected and by the end of August 1946 – over 15 months after the German capitulation and the end of war in Europe – the last French soldier left the Levant.

## 7 Conclusion

In autumn 1943, the antifascist thinker and activist Ra'if Khūrī concluded his work about the echoes of the French Revolution in the Arab Middle East:

History is now passing its judgment on battlefields, and is about to pronounce a terrible verdict regarding on which side it wishes to live and continue its procession of progress and development: Will it be on the side of the values of religions, the French Revolution and its sister revolutions or on the side of the doctrines of Nazi reaction?<sup>1</sup>

The vision of enlightenment had significantly marked Arab intellectual debates of the past few decades. The war against Nazism, as Khūrī had argued, was neither European, nor was it limited to questions of territorial control. From his point of view, the war touched upon the prospects of the Arab East, and implied a crucial choice about the future path of Arab societies. This was no exceptional view. While Khūrī stood for the most explicit antifascist currents, concern about a victory of Nazism was anything but marginal. The ideals of the French Revolution echoed in the writings of various Arab authors. Yet, just as much as these authors' egalitarian vision of social and political liberation, radical nationalist and totalitarian ideologies had increasingly resonated in local battles over a new civic order.

The struggles for independence in Syria and Lebanon had reached new heights in May 1945, coinciding with the celebrations of the German capitulation. From the outset, Syrian and Lebanese demands for national sovereignty and self-determination had raised key questions regarding the civic order. Local encounters with Nazism stood in the very same context. In the aftermath of the First World War and in the light of profound transformations triggered by the decline and dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, both societies had to face crucial choices. While the gradual economic and social modernization of both countries and their ever closer interrelation with the various European powers had reached an irreversible stage, essential challenges persisted and required negotiation between the increasingly diverse political players. During the interwar years, the definition of community, the role of the individual, and the place of religion in society and politics lay at the core of major public debates and political conflicts.

Inspiration for these reflections came from a variety of sources. The importance of local religious and cultural traditions as political milestones and intellectual guidelines was visible in the extensive coverage of early Arab and Islamic thinkers in the numerous cultural magazines. Yet, no less important were other sources that were not immediately linked to the Levantine intellectual and cultural context. In fact, one of the most striking traits of the intellectual debates of these years was their reflection of local *and* non-local sources of thought and ideological currents. Equally diverse were the discussed topics. Contributions on Arabic poetry and early Islamic history were replenished by debates about the theories of Charles Darwin, the role of women in Soviet society, and Kemalist reforms.

Nazism and its ideological premises were prominent among these points of reference. First reports about the rise of the National Socialist movement can be traced to the mid-1920s; with Hitler's takeover as Reich Chancellor in January 1933, Nazism had turned into an almost daily topic in the local press. In most cases, these early sources of information and comments were directly related to specific administrative decisions or political moves pursued by the Nazi regime. Fascination for Hitler and the effective mobilization of the nation against its perceived enemies from both within and without were additional features of this coverage. The detailed information available to the broader public is noteworthy in this context. Drawing primarily on European sources, most papers closely followed developments in Germany and the reactions of its European neighbours. With ever more sophistication, the commentators of local daily newspapers such as *al-Nahār* and *al-Qabas* interpreted German moves and questioned their political and ideological backgrounds.

By the mid-1930s, references to Nazism had exceeded the limits of daily politics and immediate assessments of international events; by then, major journals frequently elaborated upon and discussed facets of National Socialist ideology. Throughout the following years, specific aspects of Nazism were addressed as potential starting points for broader questions occupying local societies. In this context, National Socialist youth formations, the German concept of the *Volk* and the role of the *Führer* as an undisputed representation of the people's will furnished important stimuli that were to resonate in the evolving local ideological currents.

National Socialism was no arbitrary ensemble of patterns of thought and ideological assumptions; its various facets – including the authoritarian structure of rule, the totalitarian organization of society according to a *völkisch* concept of community, and the anti-Semitic and racial outlook – reflected a consistent *Weltanschauung* and a determined political programme. Nevertheless, apologetic references to Nazism did not necessarily imply an outright affirmation or rejection of the complete set of ideas and concepts as articulated and put into practice in the German society of the day. In fact, unreserved or almost unconditional approvals of Nazism were rare. While they existed, ambivalent allusions were much more common that included the appraisal of certain aspects and the rejection of others.

The implied breakdown of Nazism into various ideological facets echoed another characteristic of these debates: Nazism was not necessarily perceived as

distinct from other ideologies that had emerged or achieved power during these years. More specifically, an affirmative stance towards Nazism did not oblige rejection of ideas articulated in French, Turkish, or Russian discourses, or vice versa. Intellectuals like Edmond Rabbath, Mīshāl 'Aflaq, Anjūn Sa'āda, and others drew on a variety of sources that were not exclusively linked to one particular current or national context. For them, the intellectual choice was not between Nazi Germany and, say, France; in their perspective, the choice was between essentialist constructions of the collective on the one hand and voluntaristic constructions on the other, or between authoritarian concepts of rule and their liberal democratic counterparts. In this regard, the virtually unanimous rejection of the National Socialist concept of 'race' did not imply a rejection of hermetic, pseudo-biologicistic conceptualizations of the Arab nation. While racial theories as promoted by National Socialist thinkers were refuted, theories of geographically, linguistically, or culturally determined 'historical races' – which were often formulated with recourse to French, British, and Italian thinkers – had become ever more popular among local nationalist movements.

What is striking, then, is the ambivalence of many contemporary thinkers with regard to their very own references to non-local intellectual sources. Although authors such as 'Aflaq and Sa'āda reveal some of the intellectual sources of their thoughts and reflections, their political and ideological visions are vehemently defended as authentic; they were anything but adoptions of 'non-Arab' or 'non-Syrian' ideas. As for Nazism itself, which pretended to reflect an authentic message of the German *Volk*, assertions of authenticity were central to most local nationalist currents. Notwithstanding clear affinities to National Socialist thought, even ideologies such as Sa'āda's Syrian nationalism with its explicit claim of an authentic message endowed to the Syrian nation had to be defined as pure and nationally distinct. Consequently, contemporary charges of National Socialist inspiration that were levelled against several local organizations were not refuted as misrepresenting the premises of these formations' visions; instead, these charges were rejected for placing doubt over these formations' authentic Arab, Syrian, or Lebanese origin.

These debates, which reverberated not only among the intellectual elite, but also in the daily press and the wider public, limited the political positioning vis-à-vis Germany and its local representatives. In retrospect, the contacts and cooperation of local activists and political personalities with the German officials were often depicted as mere strategic alliances that were due to the specific balance of power of the time. Germany, it is asserted, was simply the sole ally available. Contemporary discussions, however, allow for questioning of these interpretations. Public debates about existing or potential relations with the Nazi regime were controversial not so much due to conflicting strategic assessments of the available options, but often for explicit ideological reasons. Individuals and groupings that went ahead with their rapprochements with German officials were aware that such approaches were sharply rejected by others.

Notwithstanding these reservations, several connections between local organizations and the German regime were established. In addition to personal relations

with the consulate general and often biographical ties to Germany that dated back to the 1920s or earlier, individual members of various political currents had on different occasions voiced requests for exchange and support. It is important to note that such an interest was not limited to any of the sectarian and political spectra, but ranged from Maronite Archbishop Mubārak to members of the Syrian National Bloc. In this regard, the relations entertained by the Arab Nationalist Party and its affiliated circles differed not only with respect to the extent of the desired German support, but the party had also explicitly based its approaches on shared political visions. In the months following the armistice agreement between France and the Axis powers in June 1940 and the subsequent establishment of the Italian Armistice Commission in Beirut, the profoundness of these links became evident. While the German agents tried to extend their reach to most spectra in Syria and Lebanon – approaching not only radical Arab nationalist circles, but also diverse representatives of other ethnic and sectarian currents – the circles associated with the Arab Nationalist Party took the lead in the pro-German resistance against Britain and Free France in early 1941.

Yet the brief presence of the IAC and its German sub-commission had left few visible traces. In some circles, German activities had nevertheless furthered pro-German inclinations. While none of the Syrian and Lebanese activists who had entertained contacts with German officials achieved a decisive role in Arab–German relations, the exiled community that had taken refuge in Turkey and in countries under Axis control was closely engaged in Arab–German cooperation. Although this cooperation was anything but smooth, hope for a substantial Arab–German alliance persisted.

This assessment of existing relations with the German regime should be complemented by two additional observations. Internationally, contacts with Nazi Germany were not immediately considered taboo. In fact, continuing relations entertained by France, Britain, and the USA with the new German government were carefully noted among the local public. Notwithstanding the international protests against specific German policies, the rise of the Nazi regime did not thwart political, economic, and cultural exchanges. In Syria and Lebanon, the persistence of these continuing relations was visible. Despite concerns about potential German interventions in local politics, the French High Commissioner himself did not preclude contacts and cooperation with the German consulate general. Hopes for German support that were entertained in parts of the public in the years preceding the Second World War have thus to be placed within this context; while ideological reservations about approaches to Germany might have existed, contacts with German officials were not discredited *per se*.

A second observation is related to this. Stylistic allusions of local groups – such as the Katā'ib and the Iron Shirts – to their National Socialist and Italian Fascist counterparts were often perceived as clear references to both regimes. It is noticeable, however, that leading personalities of these groups did not consider Nazism and Fascism as their sole inspirations. In fact, while high-ranking representatives like Gemayel and Barūdī explicitly alluded to the Hitler Youth and Italian Fascist organizations as examples for their ambitions, Kemalist and communist



groups were often referred to as well. As was the case with regard to intellectual reflections about National Socialist premises among the local public, here again Nazism was not necessarily perceived as a distinct political movement. While the Hitler Youth figured prominently in these considerations about an appropriate youth organization, from a local perspective its style and impetus were not exclusively tied to National Socialist ideology. Allusions to Fascist and National Socialist modes of organization and appearance were nevertheless neither superficial, nor random. Instead, paramilitary formations mirrored the fascination for an authoritarian order that would advance the nation's struggle for revival and appeared as an effective instrument for organizing the youth to confront its political enemies. Nazism, in this sense, was one point of reference. In the context of the 1930s, however, such formations were not limited to Germany, but were established in other parts of Europe as well. In spite of the apparent vagueness of their inspirations, formations such as al-Katā'ib and Iron Shirts pursued very concrete political goals.

An important facet of Arab encounters with Nazism relates to echoes of National Socialist anti-Semitic thought among the local public. In Syria and Lebanon, the 1930s witnessed mounting activities linked to the escalating conflict in Palestine and the prospects of increasing Jewish immigration. The evolving importance of the Palestinian struggle in the Arab nationalist agitation coincided with mounting tensions with local Syrian and Lebanese Jews. While the sectarian relations between the different communities had previously known periods of tensions, the status of the Jewish communities did not fundamentally differ from others religious minorities; although anti-Jewish resentments existed, the predominantly urban communities in Damascus, Beirut and Aleppo were no targets for organized or recurring hostilities.

National Socialist persecutions of German Jews nevertheless provoked considerable attention. The outraged reactions to Maronite Patriarch 'Arīḍa's expressions of sympathy for German Jews in early summer 1933 were an example of the fragility of the Jews' position. 'Arīḍa's statement that was vehemently rejected in Christian and Muslim circles highlighted the shared status of Jews and Christians as minorities in a hostile surrounding. For Arab nationalists, the Patriarch's stance was a direct assault against the foundations of the nation. Arab nationalist thought had increasingly called for concerted efforts to preserve the community against threats of dissolution. From this viewpoint, immigrant Jews – as well as Armenian and Assyrian minorities from Turkey and Iraq – were undermining the consolidation of a nation suffering from internal fragmentation and outside domination.

For many, news about German anti-Semitic persecution thus seemed to confirm an emerging conviction: if a powerful German nation feels threatened by Jews, a suppressed Arab nation could hardly accept their presence. Following this logic, Arab nationalist agitations increasingly affected local Jews as well. Despite repeated efforts by moderate nationalist circles to prevent attacks on the Jewish quarter in the old town of Damascus, hostilities shifted ever more from 'Zionist' to unspecified Jewish targets. In the case of the Syrian Nationalist Party, this identification of the Jews as an enemy to the nation was most explicit. By the

late 1930s, circles affiliated to this party had openly adopted National Socialist positions.

Until the beginning of the war in 1939, German propaganda in the region had rarely attempted to highlight German anti-Semitic positions. Within the context of Arab–German relations, anti-Semitic persecutions in Germany appeared to be ambivalent. While the German consulate in Beirut observed widespread sympathy for German anti-Jewish policies – as did its counterparts in Jerusalem, Cairo, and Baghdad – it was eager to avoid direct responsibility for mounting Jewish immigration. ‘Ādil Arslān, for one, explicitly voiced concern about the impact of German anti-Jewish persecutions on the mounting pressure of Jewish immigration. Notwithstanding his own anti-Jewish conviction, Arslān considered German politics to be a stab in the back.

In the light of previous European interventions in the Middle East, other observers considered international responses to German policies hypocritical. From a local viewpoint, the reluctance of Germany’s neighbours to grant refuge to German Jews was even more dubious as these states were far less opposed to Jewish settlements in Palestine, Syria, and Lebanon. If Europe were facing a minority problem, it was asked, why then should this problem be solved at the expense of others? In this respect, international reactions to the fate of the German Jews only confirmed the suspicions about humanitarian arguments that had in the past been used in European politics as a cover for territorial ambitions.

This said, concern was not limited to the hypocrisy of Germany’s neighbours. Since 1933, individuals in communist circles and other personalities had come out against German anti-Jewish policies. The idea of a Jew being the natural enemy of the German nation was identified as an essential part of the National Socialist vision just as much as the repression of political opposition and the campaigns against critical intellectuals. While this stance did not imply a readiness to accommodate Jewish refugees, neither in Palestine nor in Syria and Lebanon, it reflected awareness of the threat posed by the National Socialist regime.

The League against Nazism and Fascism in Syria and Lebanon that had emerged in the mid-1930s played an important role in spreading and substantiating this awareness. Popular attention, which was attracted to its activities throughout the late 1930s and early 1940s, illustrates the local public’s incessant anxiety about Nazi German politics and ideology. In this regard, the antifascist conference that was organized in May 1939 stood for the goals pursued by these circles. While the conference called for a unified front against Nazism, it was no less critical of traditional pro-colonial currents in France and the French administration. In addition, the ‘fascist threat’, as it was labelled, had left its marks on Syria and Lebanon. In the late 1930s, as well as following the British and Free French occupation of both countries in July 1941, the League dedicated much of its attention to the struggle against local groupings considered as aided or inspired by Nazism and Italian Fascism.

The antifascist League illustrates the many parallels that were noticeable in the developments in Lebanon and Syria. Despite considerable differences in their respective sectarian and social structures, both societies faced similar challenges

with regard to social and political transformations. Political organizations such as the Communist Party, the League of National Action, the Syrian Nationalist Party and the Arab Nationalist Party, which were active in all parts of the French administered territories, voiced political demands and visions shared on both sides of the border. This was also true for intellectual discourses that evolved during these years. While important particularities existed, many of the intellectual concepts elaborated in the interwar period resounded equally amongst Lebanese and Syrian thinkers.

It is thus not surprising that German politics towards the two countries did not differentiate in essence between the two sides; the efforts of the German consulate in Beirut, but also those of later missions of Roser, Hentig, and Rahn, were open to most currents active in Syria and Lebanon. Warnings of an Arab-Muslim alliance with Nazi Germany, which were frequently evoked by France and pro-French Christian circles to enforce France's image as protector of the Christian population, only partly reflected the developments on the ground. While Italian Fascist propagandists had particularly focused on Lebanese and Syrian Christians, the German strategy did not preclude either of the various sectarian groups. This non-specificity of the German approach matched the interest articulated on the Arab side. While sympathies tended to be more explicit amongst the Muslim population, prominent members of the Christian communities had engaged in direct contact with German officials as well. Fascination for Hitler's resolute rule or the desire for German support, which was shared in different political and sectarian spectra, did not preclude violent dissent amongst those who articulated them.

The episode of Arab–National Socialist encounters did not end in May 1945, and echoes of Arab–German relations continued to resonate in the public in the post-war years. The picture of Palestinian Mufti Amīn al-Ḥusaynī in a meeting with Hitler, which was published in spring 1946 in an Egyptian newspaper, provoked various reactions in the Syrian and Lebanese press. Kāmil Murūwa, who had worked as a local correspondent for the *Deutsche Nachrichten-Büro* in Beirut in 1940 and later – following his escape to Istanbul and Berlin in summer 1941 – had served in the Sofia office of the German propaganda apparatus, felt obliged to take a stand. In an editorial for his recently founded newspaper *al-Ḥayāt*, he commented on the picture and its implied message:

Some newspapers have criticized [the publication of] this photo and pretended that it is a fake. We prefer to put an end to the rumours, and to confirm that the photo is real. The Mufti had in fact met with Hitler, and he had met with other German leaders [as well]. Other photos exist, which comes as no surprise, because the Mufti had spent nearly four years in Germany! But what is the problem about the Mufti's meeting with Hitler and others? Reality proves that his Eminence only travelled to Germany against his own desire. ... Could the Mufti reject a meeting with Hitler if [the Arab cause] called for this? ... These talks in themselves do not reveal any lessons; what counts are the convictions [of those involved], the actual events, and the results. As for the photos, they do not mean anything, they do not show anything but faces.<sup>2</sup>

Murūwa was one of several personalities who feared that their relations with Nazi Germany might now discredit their reputation.<sup>3</sup> This fear, however, turned out to be unfounded. While Murūwa's journalistic career in Lebanon had only started, Najīb and Munīr al-Rayyis were able to continue theirs. Others, such as Nabīh al-ʿAẓma and his brother ʿĀdil, acquired veteran positions in the new Syrian government of President Shukrī al-Quwwatī. While Shakīb Arslān had returned to Beirut from his Swiss exile in autumn 1946, where he soon afterwards died, his brother ʿĀdil returned to Damascus, serving as a political adviser to Quwwatī and acting president of Damascus University.<sup>4</sup> Yet, the political turmoil of the late 1940s and early 1950s both in Syria and Lebanon precluded any lasting political impact by these personalities.<sup>5</sup> On another level, the radicalization of pan-Arab thought, as articulated by the Baʿth Party on the one hand, and the Arab Nationalist Party on the other, indicated the persistent impact of ideological concepts that had taken shape in the context of the intellectual quest for orientation of the past few years. In the post-war period, illiberal and totalitarian concepts of community and apologies for authoritarian rule were increasingly taking root. While references to National Socialist ideology were rarely explicit, fascination for Nazism had clearly left its marks.<sup>6</sup>

In retrospect, the continuing reluctance of France to submit to local demands for independence considerably weakened the standing of those currents that had opted for anti-German opposition. In this sense, the turmoil of May 1945 proved crucial. Not all who had come out against Nazi Germany were proponents of democratic rule; those who were, however, now significantly lost ground. While calls for a democratic and egalitarian order had increasingly echoed among the local public, France's show of strength in the wake of the German capitulation was a considerable blow to these voices. Instead of proving that the supporters of the Allies were right, by turning the victory over Nazism into a starting gun that signalled the onset of a new era, the events of early summer 1945 pushed these currents to the margins. Not individual rights and independence, but yet another betrayal of the local population by European powers came to be associated with the end of the Second World War.

# Notes

## 1 Introduction

- 1 AAPA CGB 60, Letter Bünger (Berlin) to CGB, 27 January 1935. In the following, all translations from Arabic, French, and German sources are those of the author – unless stated otherwise.
- 2 AAPA CGB 60, German translation of letter by Sheikh Raḥḥāl Shaybān (Baalbek) to Hitler, 18 July 1933.
- 3 AAPA CGB 60, AA to CGB, 26 Sep. 1933.
- 4 See N. Aṛsiyān, *‘Aṣḍā’ al-ibāda al-arminiyya fī-l-ṣiḥāfa al-sūriyya (1877–1930)*, Damascus: Dār al-Dhākir, 2004, pp. 84–8.
- 5 Cf. e.g. L. Hirszowicz, *The Third Reich and the Arab East*, London: Routledge, 1966, C. Metzger, *L’Empire colonial français dans la stratégie du Troisième Reich (1936–1945)*, Brussels: P.I.E.-Peter Lang, 2002, ‘A. Maḥāfza, *Mawqif firansā wa almāniyā wa ṭālīyā min al-waḥda al-‘arabiyya 1919–1945*, Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 1985, F. Nicosia, ‘Arab Nationalism and National Socialist Germany, 1933–1939: Ideological and Strategic Incompatibility’, *International Journal for Middle East Studies*, no. 12, 1980, pp. 351–72, and K.-M. Mallmann and M. Cüppers, *Halbmond und Hakenkreuz. Das Dritte Reich, die Araber und Palästina*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006.
- 6 Cf. I. Gershoni, *Light in the Shade: Egypt and Fascism 1922–1937 [in Hebrew]*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1999, C. Schumann, ‘Symbolische Aneignungen. Antun Sa’adas Radikalnationalismus in der Epoche des Faschismus’, in G. Höpp, P. Wien, and R. Wildangel (eds), *Blind für die Geschichte? Arabische Begegnungen mit dem Nationalsozialismus*, Berlin: Hans Schiler Verlag, 2004, R. Wildangel, *Zwischen Achse und Mandatsmacht. Palästina und der Nationalsozialismus*, Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2007, P. Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism. Authoritarian, totalitarian, and pro-fascist inclinations, 1932–1941*, London: Routledge, 2006, J. Baida, ‘Das Bild des Nationalsozialismus in der Presse Marokkos’, in Höpp *et al.* (eds), *Blind für die Geschichte?* Previous studies often focused on particular currents and parties; see S. Wild, ‘National Socialism in the Arab Near East between 1933 and 1939’, *Die Welt des Islams*, no. 25, 1985. With a particular focus on Syria and Lebanon: P. Rondot, ‘Les mouvements nationalistes au Levant durant la deuxième guerre mondiale (1939–1945)’, in *La Guerre en Méditerranée*, Paris: CNRS, 1971, M. Mendel and Z. Müller, ‘Fascist tendencies in the Levant in the 1930s and 1940s’, *Archiv Orientalni*, no. 55, 1987, I. Rabinovich, ‘Germany and the Syrian political scene in the late 1930s’, in J. Wallach (ed.), *Germany and the Middle East 1835–1939*, Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1975, and ‘A. Hannā, *Al-ḥaraka al-munāhiḍa li-l-fāshiyya fī sūriyā wa lubnān 1933–45*, Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 1974.
- 7 R. Wildangel, ‘Der größte Feind der Menschheit. Der Nationalsozialismus in der arabischen Meinung in Palästina während des Zweiten Weltkrieges’, in Höpp *et al.* (eds), *Blind für die Geschichte?* pp. 115–19.

- 8 Nicosia, 'Arab nationalism', p. 351.
- 9 B. Nafi, 'The Arabs and the Axis: 1933–1940', *Arab Studies Quarterly*, no. 2, 1997, p. 18.
- 10 Wild, 'National Socialism', p. 170.
- 11 Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism*, p. 115.
- 12 Rabinovich, 'Germany', p. 191.
- 13 Important works in this regard are H. Šāghhiyya, *Qawmiyyū al-mashriq al-'arabī. min drayfūs ilā ghārūdī*, Beirut: Riad El-Rayyes Books, 2000, pp. 190–250, C. Schumann, 'Symbolische Aneignungen. Antun Sa'adas Radikálnationalismus in der Epoche des Faschismus', in Höpp *et al.* (eds), *Blind für die Geschichte?* pp. 155–89, H. Šāghhiyya, *Tā'rib al-katā'ib al-lubnāniyya. al-ḥizb, al-sulṭa, al-khawf*, Beirut: Dār al-Jadīd, 1991, pp. 97–108, and K. Watenpau, 'Steel Shirts, White Badges and the last qabaday: Fascism, urban violence and civic identity in Aleppo under French rule', in N. Méouchy (ed.), *France, Syrie et Liban 1918–1946. Les ambiguïtés et les dynamiques de la relation mandataire*, Damascus: Institut Français d'Études Arabes de Damas, 2002.
- 14 I. Gershoni, 'Egyptian Liberalism in an age of "Crisis of Orientation": Al-Risāla's reaction to Fascism and Nazism, 1933–39', *International Journal for Middle East Studies*, no. 31, 1999, p. 554.
- 15 Thompson quotes estimates setting the death rate for the First World War as up to 18 per cent for the population of Greater Syria, with 500,000 dead from famine and 150,000 killed in fighting (E. Thompson, *Colonial Citizens. Republican rights, paternal privileges, and gender in French Syria and Lebanon*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, p. 23).
- 16 A.-L. Dupont and C. Mayeur-Jaouen, 'Monde nouveau, voix nouvelles: états, sociétés, Islam dans l'entre-deux-guerres', in *Débats intellectuels au Moyen-Orient dans l'entre-deux-guerres. Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 95–98, Aix-en-Provence: Edisud, 2002, p. 24.
- 17 The scenery of this generation of intellectuals of the 1930s is reconstructed in L.-I. Dakhli, *Les Intellectuels syro-libanais dans la première moitié du XXe siècle 1908–1940*, PhD thesis submitted to Université Aix-Marseille (France), 2004, pp. 400–433.
- 18 See R. Schulze, *Geschichte der islamischen Welt*, Munich: C.H. Beck, 2002, pp. 27–36 and 48–54.
- 19 Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, p. 38.
- 20 P. Khoury, 'The paradoxical in Arab nationalism: Interwar Syria revisited', in J. Jankowski and I. Gershoni (eds), *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997, p. 273.
- 21 With regard to Lebanon and Syria, Elizabeth Thompson's work is of particular importance: Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*. See also N. Méouchy, 'Introduction thématique – France, Syrie et Liban, 1918–1946. Les ambiguïtés et les dynamiques de la relation mandataire', in Méouchy, *France, Syrie et Liban*, pp. 24–33, C. Eddé, 'La mobilisation populaire à Beyrouth à l'époque du mandat (1918–1943): l'apprentissage progressif de la participation', in N. Méouchy and P. Sluglett (eds), *The British and French mandates in comparative perspectives*, Leiden: Brill, 2004, pp. 623–48, J. Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties. Nationalism and mass politics in Syria at the close of the empire*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998, pp. 51–86, and J. Couland, *Le Mouvement syndical au Liban (1919–1946)*, Paris: Editions Sociales, 1970, pp. 32–80.
- 22 Already during the years of the Arab government of 1918–20 several political parties and clubs had developed, see E. Tauber, *The Formation of Modern Syria and Iraq*, Ilford: Frank Cass, 1995, pp. 49–67.
- 23 See E. Burke, 'Towards a history of urban collective action in the Middle East: continuities and change, 1750–1980', in *Etat, ville et mouvements sociaux au Maghreb et au Moyen-Orient (Urban Crisis and Social Movements in the Middle East)*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1989, pp. 42–50, and also J. Beinín, *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 71–98.

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- 25 P. Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate. The politics of Arab nationalism 1920–1945*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987, pp. 311 and 409–14, and U. Freitag, *Geschichtsschreibung in Syrien 1920–1990. Zwischen Wissenschaft und Ideologie*, Hamburg: Deutsches Orient Institut, 1991, pp. 46–57. For the changing educational system and its effects on the formation of a new middle class, see C. Schumann, *Radikalnationalismus in Syrien und Libanon. Politische Sozialisation und Elitenbildung 1930–1958*, Hamburg: Deutsches Orient Institut, 2001, pp. 192–6.
- 26 For a history of these encounters, see A. Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798–1939*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 34–66, and I. Abu-Lughod, *Arab Rediscovery of Europe. A study in cultural encounters*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963.
- 27 M. Dāhīr, 'Al-hayāt al-thaqāfiyya fī bayrūt khilāl al-qarn al-'ashrīn', *al-Mustaqbal al-'Arabī*, no. 253, 2000, p. 90.
- 28 'A. Hannā, *Al-ittijāhāt al-fikriyya fī sūriyā wa lubnān 1920–1945*, Damascus: Dār al-Taqaddum al-'Arabī, 1973, p. 22, and E. Shahin, 'Muhammad Rashīd Ridā's perspectives on the West as reflected in al-Manar', *Muslim World*, no. 2, 1989, and Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, pp. 222–44.
- 29 S. Seikaly, 'Imperial Germany: A view from Damascus', in G. N. Atiyeh and I. M. Oweiss (eds), *Arab Civilization. Challenges and responses*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1988, and R. Hermann, *Kulturkrise und konservative Erneuerung. Muhammad Kurd 'Alī (1876–1953) und das geistige Leben in Damaskus zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang Verlag, 1990.
- 30 See E. Tauber, 'Syrian and Iraqi nationalist attitudes to the Kemalist and Bolshevik movements', *Middle Eastern Studies*, no. 4, 1994, pp. 896–914, and W. Cleveland, 'Atatürk viewed by his Arab contemporaries: The opinions of Satī' al-Husri and Shakīb Arslan', *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, no. 2, 1981–2, pp. 15–23.
- 31 Khoury, *Syria*, pp. 245–68.
- 32 Ibid., p. 251.
- 33 Ibid., p. 268.
- 34 J.-D. Mizrahi, 'La France et sa politique de mandat en Syrie et au Liban (1920–1939)', in Méouchy (ed.), *France, Syrie et Liban*, pp. 55–6, and M. Zamir, *Lebanon's Quest. The road to statehood 1926–1939*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2000, pp. 128–35.
- 35 See R. El-Solh, *Lebanon and Arabism. National identity and state formation*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2004, pp. 25–33, and Khoury, *Syria*, pp. 397–433.
- 36 See Kh. Bu Sa'īd, 'Uṣbat al-'amal al-qawmī wa dawruhā fī lubnān wa sūriyā 1933–1939', Beirut: Centre for Arab Unity Studies, 2004, pp. 107–22.
- 37 Sh. Juhā, *Al-ḥaraka al-'arabiyya al-sirriyya. Jamā'at al-kitāb al-āḥmar – 1935–1945*, Beirut: al-Furāt, 2004, pp. 31–74.
- 38 See B. Anderson, 'Defining liberal education at the American University of Beirut (AUB): Education, Protestantism, and service to the nation' (paper presented at the conference *The Roots of Liberal Thought in the Eastern Mediterranean*, University of Erlangen July–August 2005), in C. Schumann (ed.), *The Roots of Liberal Thought in the Eastern Mediterranean*, Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2008.
- 39 Freitag, *Geschichtsschreibung*, pp. 46–56.
- 40 N. Méouchy, 'La presse de Syrie et du Liban entre les deux guerres (1918–1939)', in *Débats intellectuels au Moyen-Orient dans l'entre-deux-guerres*, *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 95–98, Aix-en-Provence: Edisud, 2002, pp. 55–70. See also Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, pp. 211–23.
- 41 Sh. Rifā'ī, *Tārīkh al-ṣiḥāfa al-sūriyya 1918–1947 – al-juz' al-thānī*, Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1969, pp. 11–18, and Méouchy, *Presse*, p. 57.

- 42 Méouchy, *Presse*, p. 60.
- 43 Ibid., pp. 67–8, J. Iliyās, *Taṭawwur al-ṣiḥāfa al-sūriyya fī mi'at 'ām – al-juz' al-thānī (1865–1965)*, Beirut: Dār al-Niḍāl, 1983, pp. 45–54, and Rifā'i, *Tārīkh*, pp. 96–133.
- 44 Dupont and Mayeur-Jaouen, *Monde Nouveau*, p. 11.

## 2 Struggles for a new order: the rise of the Nazi regime and the Levantine mandates (1933–1936)

- 1 See e.g. H. Abū 'Izz al-Dīn, *Tilka-l-ayyām. Mudhakkirāt wa dhikrayāt – vol. 1*, Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīda, 1982, pp. 75–6.
- 2 'A. Sha'ib, *Al-ṣirā' al-ittālī al-firansī 'alā bilād al-shām (1860–1941)*, Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 2002, pp. 67–73. See also M. Williams, *Mussolini's propaganda abroad. Subversion in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, 1935–1940*, London: Routledge, 2006, pp. 30–43. Cf. *Al-fāshizm aw al-nahḍa al-ittālīyya al-ḥadūtha*, Aleppo: Maṭba'at al-Nahḍa al-'Arabiyya, 1926.
- 3 'Intikhāb al-marshāl Hindinburg', *al-Insāniyya*, 15 May 1925.
- 4 M. al-Nuṣūlī, 'Al-sharq lam ya'ud sharqan', *al-Nidā'*, 29 June 1933.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 'Walī 'ahd almāniyā al-sābiq', *al-Ma'riḍ*, 13 March 1932.
- 7 Sh. Arslān, 'Mawqif sūriyā', *al-Qabas*, 3 March 1933. *al-Qabas* reprinted this letter from the local newspaper *al-'Ahd al-Jadīd* where it was published a few days earlier.
- 8 The public burning of books in Germany, for instance, echoed in a critique of a local boycott of the Egyptian author Ṭaḥa Ḥusayn. This boycott was labelled as 'Nazi', see 'Al-fāshistiyya wa-l-nāziyya wa-l-ṭarbūshiyya', *al-Nahār*, 7 September 1933.
- 9 'Makhluṭa', *al-Muḍḥik al-Mubkī*, 4 March 1933.
- 10 'Dustūr almāniyā', *al-Dabbūr*, 6 March 1933.
- 11 A. I. Baaklini describes the parliament in the context of the French mandate as 'a symbol and instrument for national resistance' (A. I. Baaklini, *Legislative and Political Development. Lebanon, 1842–1972*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1976, p. 76). The dispute over the future system of rule – the choice between monarchy and republic – echoed in the daily press. In his analysis of major debates in local newspapers, J. Iliyās argues that the gradual decline of the monarchist position in the 1930s was due to the rise of 'Arab unity' as a Leitmotif in public discourses. The vision of a secular republican regime came to replace the ideal of an Islamic caliphate, reflecting the shift from the Islamic umma to the Arab nation, see J. Iliyās, *Taṭawwur al-ṣiḥāfa al-sūriyya fī mi'at 'ām – al-juz' al-thānī (1865–1965)*, Beirut: Dār al-Niḍāl, 1983, pp. 47–52.
- 12 M. 'Ajlānī, 'Hal bada'at al-thawra fī almāniyā', *al-Qabas*, 16 July 1934.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid. Only two days later, *al-Qabas* further added to this argument. Taking up Hitler's speech of 13 July 1934, the paper described his first months in power as 'a proof for his and his party's merits' ('Khiṭāb hitlir', *al-Qabas*, 18 July 1934). The author of this article is only identified as 'a political writer for *al-Qabas*', probably 'Ajlānī.
- 15 'Hitlir ba'd al-istiftā' al-sha'bī fī almāniyā', *al-Qabas*, 23 August 1934. The article is again signed with 'a political writer for *al-Qabas*'.
- 16 Cf. M. Zakkūr, 'Al-ḍagḥ al-māddī wa-l-siyāsī', *al-Ma'riḍ*, 25 July 1935, and M. Zakkūr, 'Nizā' al-diktātūriyya', *al-Ma'riḍ*, 19 October 1935.
- 17 M. Zakkūr, 'Al-mayādīn al-ḥamra', *al-Ma'riḍ*, 5 August 1935.
- 18 'Waṣāyā al-zawāj', *al-Ṣiḥāfī al-Tā'ih*, 3 October 1934.
- 19 'Hitlir wa taṭhīr al-nasl al-jirmānī', *al-Ma'riḍ*, 8 May 1932.
- 20 For instance, *al-Qabas* explicitly questioned the assertion of the 'purity of blood', which could be preserved by eugenics ('Dam firansā āṣfā am dam almāniyā?', *al-Qabas*, 28 October 1935). Support for eugenics was expressed by others, see for instance S. Farrūkh, 'Bi-munāsabat qānūn al-ta'qīm fī almāniyā', *Ṣawt al-Ahrār*, 12 September 1933.



- 21 See 'A. al-Yāzījī, 'Ibdāl al-jinsiyya lā yulāshī al-'unşuriyya', *al-Sha'b*, 9 May 1934, and 'Difā' jarīda firansiyya 'an al-ashūriyyīn', *al-Nidā'*, 16 August 1933.
- 22 References to the German nationalist struggle for unity were frequent. Cf. a speech by Jamīl Bayhum in Beirut in which he compared Syrian nationalist leader Ibrāhīm Hanānū with German Feldmarschal Hindenburg ('Khiṭāb al-ustādh Jamīl Bayhum fī bayrūt', *al-Ayyām*, 10 January 1936).
- 23 See S. Wild, 'National Socialism in the Arab Near East between 1933 and 1939', *Die Welt des Islams*, no. 25, 1985, pp. 147–8.
- 24 A. Hitler, 'Kifāhī', *al-Nidā'*, 20 January 1934. The 'introduction by the translator' is signed by Kāmil Murūwa. In the header of the page, however, Murūwa is not mentioned as the translator. Instead, the header reads 'Author: Adolf Hitler, translated into Arabic by: "Mālik".' All the other sequels are attributed to 'Mālik'. Murūwa's name is never mentioned again. It is not unlikely that the revelation of Murūwa's name as the translator of the text was unintended.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 K. al-Şulḥ, 'Li-mādhā 'arrabnā wa nasharnā kitāb Hitler "kifāhī"', *al-Nidā'*, 22 May 1934. In a previous article, Şulḥ had criticized the National Socialist slogan 'Germany above all' and the related racial hierarchy (K. Şulḥ, 'Al-sha'b al-'arabī huwa āḥaṭṭ min al-zunūj', *al-Nidā'*, 20 April 1934).
- 28 'Al-waṭaniyya al-almāniyya', *al-Nidā'*, 10 August 1933.
- 29 See W. al-Ḥaffār, 'Al-dīn l-illāh wa-l-waṭan li-l-jamī'!', *al-Qabas*, 7 July 1935.
- 30 See AAPA CGB 50, German Consulate Geneva to AA, 'Kongreß der mohamedanischen Minderheiten in Europa in Genf', 25 September 1935.
- 31 See e.g. 'Fawḍā, nāqiḍ, iṣlāḥ', *al-Ma'riḍ*, 8 May 1932.
- 32 With regard to the Assyrians, the newspaper *al-Ahrār* claimed that this community was created by the colonial powers as 'the latest tool to block the jihad of the Arabs for freedom' ('Al-umma al-āshūriyya', *al-Ahrār*, 11 August 1933).
- 33 For instance, Jibrān Tuwaynī, the editor of *al-Nahār*, declared: 'We [the Arabs] do not ask Europe's "humanism" to grant us mercy or sympathy. We claim a legitimate right' (J. Tuwaynī, 'Ya'ṭifūna 'alayhim wa ya'ṭunahum al-jinsiyya', *al-Nahār*, 11 August 1933).
- 34 See e.g. 'Jam'iyyat al-umam tantaṣir li-yahūd almāniyā', *al-Sha'b*, 8 October 1933.
- 35 'Li-mādhā lā yaqūlūna fihim mā yaqūlūna finā?', *al-Nidā'*, 5 April 1933. Another argument forwarded in these discussions focused on the deprivation of the Palestinian Arabs of their legitimate rights. In a petition to the League of Nations, the League of National Action questioned the logic of a settlement of German Jews in Palestine: '[I]t is unreasonable and unjust to oblige the Arab population of Palestine to bear the burden and the results of the persecution against Jews by other nations' (Memorandum by LNA to the President of the League of Nations, October 1933, attached to AAPA R78425, CGB Beirut, CGB to AA (J. N. 3347), 25 October 1933, p. 2)
- 36 See 'Hitlir wa-l-yahūd fī almāniyā', *al-Ma'riḍ*, 7 February 1932.
- 37 See the long article by the Swiss-German author Emil Ludwig about anti-Semitic policies in Germany, E. Ludwig, 'Idṭihādāt al-almān li-l-yahūd', *al-Nidā'*, 11 April 1933.
- 38 By 1945, an estimated 30,000 Jews were living in Syria, Ph. S. Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate. The politics of Arab nationalism 1920–1945*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987, p. 15. According to the census of 1932, the number of Jews living in Lebanon amounted to 3,600, K. Schulze, *Jews of Lebanon. Between Coexistence and Conflict*, Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2001, p. 35.
- 39 Schulze, *Jews*, p. 34.
- 40 L. Z. Eisenberg, *My enemy's enemy. Lebanon in Early Zionist Imagination, 1900–1948*, Detroit, MI: Wayne State University, 1994, pp. 61–67, Schulze, *Jews*, p. 41 and p. 52, and Ḥ. Ḥallāq, *Mawqif lubnān min al-qaḍiyya al-filasṭīniyya 1918–1952*, Amman: Dār al-Shurūq, 2002, pp. 35–49.
- 41 Khoury, *Syria*, p. 301.

- 42 Important in this context were traditional Christian anti-Jewish accusations such as the blood libel. Most of the early anti-Jewish literature in Lebanon – as in other parts of the Arab world – originated from within the Christian community, see Schulze, *Jews*, pp. 18 and 37. Noteworthy, then, is a French report from the early 1930s that emphasized the lack of any similar anti-Jewish hostility among the Muslim community: ‘La population musulmane ne manifeste à l’égard de ces anciens juifs aucune hostilité particulière. Aucun problème antisémite ne se pose actuellement dans la politique syrienne.’ (Nantes 615, ‘Note sur la question juive en Syrie’, probably late 1933, p. 2)
- 43 See, among others, ‘Nuwādīr al-‘uzamā’, *al-Muḏḥik al-Mubkī*, 15 July 1933, ‘Musāwama yahūdiyya’, *al-Muḏḥik al-Mubkī*, 11 November 1933, and ‘Fatāwā al-dabbūr’, *al-Dabbūr*, 7 August 1933. Discussing a possible immigration of German Jews, the newspaper *al-Ṣiḥāfī al-Tā’ih* invoked the crucifixion of Jesus for which the Jews were said to be responsible (‘Alladhīna ṣalabū al-masīḥ’, *al-Ṣiḥāfī al-Tā’ih*, 6 June 1933). The crucifixion is also central to an article in *al-Sha’b*; here, the author wonders whether the Patriarch had forgotten that the Jews ‘are those who crucified our lord Jesus?!’, ‘Al-yahūd wa-l-biṭrīrk’, *al-Sha’b*, 30 June 1933. With regard to the emerging conflict in Palestine, Jibrān Tuwaynī wrote in *al-Nahār*: ‘The nations that are [now] celebrating the birth of Christ are surrendering the land of Christ – the grave of Christ – to the descendants of those who persecuted Christ and crucified him’, J. Tuwaynī, ‘Mutanāqīdāt’, *al-Nahār*, 28 December 1933.
- 44 See e.g. an article about Jews being involved in financial scandals in Turkey. Here it is argued that while ‘normally’ you should expect a woman to be behind every crime, in cases of financial scandals you should ‘look for the Jew’, ‘Al-yahūd fī turkiyā’, *al-Sha’b*, 11 June 1934.
- 45 Cf. ‘Ṭalā’i al-ṣaḥyūniyya fī ḥumṣ’, *al-Sha’b*, 6 August 1933 and ‘Yahūdī almānī’, *Ṣawt al-Ahrār*, 21 November 1933. See also ‘Yahūd al-sār fī bayrūt’, *al-Ṣiḥāfī al-Tā’ih*, 13 March 1935. The author recounts an encounter in a local café in Beirut with a group of foreigners who turned out to be German Jews from the Saar region. The Saar had been re-attached to Germany in February 1935, causing the flight of its local Jewish population.
- 46 ‘Ijtima’ al-yahūd bi-bayrūt’, *al-Ahrār*, 1 April 1933, and ‘Les Juifs de Beyrouth et l’antisémitisme hitlérien’, *La Syrie*, 5 April 1933.
- 47 ‘Le Consul d’Allemagne proteste contre les décisions du congrès israélite de Beyrouth’, *L’Information*, 5 April 1933. See also AAPA R78409, CGB to AA (J.N. 1148), ‘Ausländische Greuelpropaganda’, 8 April 1933, and the coverage of the local Jewish newspaper *al-Ālam al-Isrāīlī*, 10 April 1933.
- 48 Nantes 615, SG (Beirut), ‘Ligue internationale contre l’antisémitisme’, 31 August 1933. Also Nantes 615, SG (Beirut), ‘Réunion contre le racisme et le révisionnisme’, 4 August 1933, and AAPA R78409, CGB to AA, ‘Ausländische Greuelpropaganda gegen Deutschland’, 6 April 1933.
- 49 For an assessment of the local public opinion towards Jewish immigration see a note to the French High Commissioner: Nantes 615, ‘Note sur la question juive en Syrie’, probably late 1933. Cf. the report sent by a group of Jewish youth from Beirut to the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem, CZA S25/4552II, Letter from Joseph Asrar *et al.* (Beirut) to the President of the Zionist Executive in Jerusalem, undated, apparently from the early 1930s. A French plan in 1935 to settle Assyrian refugees in the Jazira region provoked massive popular protests, see N. Bābīl, *Ṣiḥāfa wa siyāsa. sūriyya fī-l-qarn al-‘ashrīn*, Beirut: Riad El-Rayyes Books, 2001, p. 94. Earlier, in September 1934, Assyrian refugees arriving in Dayr al-Zur had been attacked by the local population (British Consulate Damascus (Gilbert MacKereth) to British Foreign Office, 30 September 1934, quoted in M. G. Fry/I. Rabinovich, *Despatches from Damascus. Gilbert MacKereth and British Policy in the Levant 1933–39*, Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1985, p. 90.).
- 50 ‘Yajib an na’tiya bi-l-yahūd li-lubnān’, *al-Ṣiḥāfī al-Tā’ih*, 21 March 1933.

- 51 In December 1933, rumours had spread according to which the High Commissioner had decided to grant up to 50,000 German Jews the right to settle and to be nationalized in the territories under French mandate, see 'A. al-Yāzījī, 'Al-maṭrūdūn min al-māniyā', *al-Sha'b*, 26 December 1933.
- 52 See for instance 'Hijrat al-aṭibbā'al-yahūd ilā sūriyā', *al-Qabas*, 20 September 1934. Earlier, reports had surfaced that the High Commissioner was trying to regulate the immigration of German-Jewish doctors, 'Qānūn jadīd li-l-aṭibbā'al-ajānib fi-l-bilād', *al-Nahār*, 6 August 1933. Rumours about German doctors that were willing to settle in Lebanon and Syria – posing a 'Jewish threat' ('Hijrat al-aṭibbā'al-yahūd ilā sūriyā', *al-Qabas*, 20 September 1934) to the community – had popped up since March 1933. The population, it was reported, was generally unwilling to trust these doctors, based on an 'existing national enmity' towards them. Local doctors in Palestine, Lebanon and Syria saw them as a direct economic threat. Delegations were sent to the Lebanese President to protest against these potential immigrants ('Mushkilat al-aṭibbā'al-almān', *al-Nidā'*, 25 May 1933). Similarly, doctors in Aleppo opposed any entry of German doctors into the territory of the French mandates ('Al-aṭibbā'yaruḫūna al-aṭibbā'al-yahūd', *al-Sha'b*, 4 July 1933). In June 1933, the Damascus daily *Alif Bā'* finally reported that two German-Jewish doctors had recently submitted an application for a licence to open a cabinet in Beirut. The article was titled: 'Is this the vanguard of the attack?' ('Hal hadhihi al-ṭalā'i' al-ghazwa?', *Alif Bā'*, 8 June 1933) Such rumours were to come up throughout the following years, see e.g. 'Al-aṭibbā'al-ajānib', *al-Nahār*, 10 September 1935. See also 'Yanzilūn lubnān', *al-Sha'b*, 16 June 1933. The anonymous reader, whose letter was published on the front page of the newspaper, holds the patriarch responsible for a supposed decision of the High Commissioner to allow 250 German doctors and pharmacists to immigrate. The letter is signed 'a Christian'. Another letter by the same author two weeks later is published on the front page of *al-Sha'b*, again warning against an immigration of 'Anarcho-Communist-Zionists' ('Sayf wa shitā', *al-Sha'b*, 3 July 1933). Yet, these rumours were baseless: in November 1936, a report from the German consulate estimated that some 15 German Jews had settled in Lebanon and Syria since 1933 (AAPA CGB 65, CGB to AA (J.N. 2051), 13 November 1936). Cf. also AAPA CGB 65, CGB to AA (J.N. 2428), 2 August 1933.
- 53 J. Tuwaynī, 'Al-nāhiyya al-qawmiyya', *al-Nahār*, 9 April 1934. Even economically, Tuwaynī questioned any positive impact of Jewish immigration for the broader Arab population, J. Tuwaynī, 'Hijrat al-yahūd ilā sūriyā wa lubnān', *al-Nahār*, 6. April 1934. In another context, *al-Nidā'* claimed that the Jewish emigration posed a threat to the very essence of Arab nationalism. If the strong German nation perceives Zionism as a threat to its national fundaments, the paper argued, should the weak Arab nation stay put? ('Qad yanjū al-'ālam kulluhu', *al-Nidā'*, 4 January 1935). Anṭūn Sa'āda, the founder of the then-clandestine Syrian Nationalist Party, also highlighted the harmful influence of immigration to national interests. With regard to the territories under French mandate, he focused on Armenian immigration and its supposedly negative impact, see A. Sa'āda, 'Azmatunā al-iqtisādiyya', *al-Majalla*, May 1933.
- 54 'Nakbat lubnān fī banī isrā'īl', *al-Shihāfī al-Tā'ih*, 25 July 1933. It is important to note that Arab nationalist circles in some instances insisted that their anti-Zionist protests were not directed against local Jews. In November 1933, the newspaper *al-Ayyām* published a statement – apparently in reaction to administrative measures taken to protect the Jewish quarter in Damascus against possible attacks – declaring: 'There shall be no fear for the Jews of Damascus. In Damascus, no one contemplates any aggression against an Israelite.' An attack against Jews would be considered 'an attack against a part of the noble nation's ensemble' – something that would be rejected by all ('Lā khawf 'alā yahūd dimashq', *al-Ayyām*, 2 November 1933). In contrast, the French Sûreté Générale noted in November 1933 the formation of a nationalist committee in Aleppo that was to organize a boycott of Jewish businesses (Nantes 615, SG (Beirut),

- 'A/S Boycottage contre les marchandises juives', 7 December 1933). Activities against Jews in general – and not only against Zionists – were also reported from Tripoli, Nantes 615, SG (Beirut), Information 'Propagande anti-juive', 17 November 1933.
- 55 See for instance 'Al-niẓām al-riyāḍī', *al-Nidā'*, 31 January 1934. Cf. with regard to related debates in Iraq, P. Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism. Authoritarian, totalitarian, and pro-fascist inclinations, 1932–1941*, London: Routledge, 2006, pp. 88–105.
- 56 'Al-niẓām al-riyāḍī', *al-Nidā'*, 31 January 1934.
- 57 Ibid. Cf. also 'Al-shabāb fī almāniyā', *al-Qabas*, 3 September 1935.
- 58 'Yā shabāb al-ʿarab!', *al-Qabas*, 5 May 1935.
- 59 *al-Nidā'* reported on a group of young Germans visiting Egypt and Iraq, 'Almān nāziyūn yazūrūna al-sharq al-adnā', *al-Nidā'*, 13 June 1934.
- 60 For one of the many articles highlighting the impact of Italian propaganda on the local youth, see 'Al-dīʿāya al-īṭāliyya fī sūriyā wa lubnān', *al-Nahār*, 9 August 1933. See also Nantes 629, HC (Beirut), Note 'A/S Propagande italienne au Liban', 13 June 1933.
- 61 'Al-shubbān al-sūriyūn wa-l-lubnāniyūn fī īṭāliyā', *al-Nidā'*, 6 September 1934.
- 62 Shaʿīb, *Al-ṣirāʿ*, pp. 94–8.
- 63 'Al-dīʿāya al-īṭāliyya al-fāshistiyya bayn al-ṭalaba al-ʿarab', *al-Qabas*, 14 September 1934. Other articles questioned the intentions of the participants: 'What kind of nationalism do you learn [during these trips]? What kind of civilization do you borrow? What kind of glorious deeds do you witness?' (W. al-Ḥaffār, 'Laysat al-waṭaniyya fī hutāfikum li-Mūsulīnī', *al-Qabas*, 18 August 1935)
- 64 As for one example, see M. ʿAjāmī, 'Al-marʾa bayn al-sharq wa-l-gharb', *al-Insāniyya*, February 1935, pp. 549–51.
- 65 'Al-nisāʾ al-almāniyyāt wa-l-iqtirā', *al-Maʿriḍ*, 15 May 1932.
- 66 'Līnīn al-shuyūʿī', *al-Nidā'*, 12 August 1933.
- 67 See e.g. 'Riwayāt ʿan Hitler wa nisāʾ almāniyā', *al-Dabbūr*, 5 November 1934.
- 68 This phenomenon is visible in 'Hitler wa-l-fatayāt', *al-Nidā'*, 24 April 1933, and 'Afāf Hitler', *al-Ṣiḥāfī al-Tāʾih*, 31 October 1934.
- 69 Hitler's relations with Riefenstahl were discussed in 'Hitler wa gharāmuhu', *al-Nidā'*, 19 October 1934. A brief news item in another paper drew attention to the fact that a German female pilot, Marga von Etsdorf [?], who had crashed with her plane near Dayr al-Zur, had in fact committed suicide out of disappointed love for Hitler, *al-Ṣiḥāfī al-Tāʾih*, 6 June 1933.
- 70 M. Ṭrād, 'Shāʿira tazūr shāʿiran', *al-Maʿriḍ*, 14 December 1935. Another such encounter with a German woman, in this case an open supporter of Nazism, is described in 'Al-ṣuḥufiyya al-almāniyya Māriyā Lūizā', *al-Nidā'*, 3 April 1934.
- 71 A related example is the coverage of the 'nudity movement' in Germany. The so-called *Freikörperkultur* movement had aroused interest in the local press long before the Nazi rise to power, e.g. cf. 'Al-urāt ālmān yasliyyūn', *al-Maʿriḍ*, 25 December 1931.
- 72 K. al-Ṣulḥ, 'Junūḥ al-marʾa ʿindanā', *al-Nidā'*, 11 March 1934.
- 73 See J. Tuwaynī, '11-11-11-18', *al-Nahār*, 11 November 1933.
- 74 'Fī urubbā wa āmrīkā wa-L-sharq', *al-Qabas*, 24 February 1933.
- 75 'Inṣihāb almāniyā min al-jāmiʿa wa muʿtamar al-silāḥ', *Ṣawt al-Ahrār*, 18 October 1933. Germany's decision to withdraw from the League caused fears that imports and exports between Germany and the territories under French mandate would be affected. Yet, the German consulate in Beirut noted that the public reaction to the German withdrawal was not as intense as 'one might have expected', see AAPA CGB 57, CGB to AA (J.N. 3612), 'Der Austritt Deutschlands aus dem Völkerbund und das Mandatsgebiet', 7 November 1933, p. 2.
- 76 Tuwaynī best expressed this view in an editorial in which he laments the state of the League that was further aggravated by Germany's threats of withdrawal, J. Tuwaynī, 'Nasibatunā ʿuṣbat al-umam', *al-Nahār*, 3 October 1933.

- 77 'Raḥima allāh fikrat ḍamm al-namsā ilā almāniyā!', *al-Ahrār*, 3 August 1933.
- 78 See e.g. 'Urubbā tasta'mir urubbā', *al-Ayyām*, 9 September 1933: 'The number of Germans in Europe is 73 million, with only 65 million of them living in Germany. And, although all Austrians are Germans, Europe prohibits their annexation to Germany.'
- 79 *al-Qabas* provided its readers with a brief historical outline of the German–Austrian conflict (M. Ḥamāda, 'Almāniyā lā taẓfaru bi-l-namsā ilā bi-l-ḥarbi!', *al-Qabas*, 10 May 1935).
- 80 In contrast, *al-Nidā* was rather supportive of German claims to the Saar region. Interestingly, a particular focus was placed on the deployment of African-born French soldiers in the region. The deployment of these soldiers, *al-Nidā* reported, had triggered widespread resentment among the German population, fearing for Germany's 'racial purity'. This argument alluded to the situation in the French mandates where large parts of the French army were recruited in France's African colonies. See 'Almān dhawū bashara sawdā', *al-Nidā*, 8 May 1934.
- 81 Iskandarūna lā taḍummu li-l-lādhīqiyya', *al-Nidā*, 21 August 1934. Another such example is a reference to the 'Palestinian Alsace-Lorraine', 'Alzās lūrīn wa filasṭīn', *al-Ṣiḥāfī al-Tā'ih*, 28 July 1933.
- 82 'After the Saar, the colonies!' was the title of an article in *al-Qabas* about ongoing debates in Germany, alluding to Germany's colonial ambitions, 'Ba'd Sār al-musta'marāt!', *al-Qabas*, 8 July 1935.
- 83 Note was taken, e.g., of the initial German support for the Abyssinian regime, which was threatened by Italian aggression, 'Almān yatatawwa'ūn fī jaysh al-ḥabasha', *al-Qabas*, 19 May 1935. After the German–Italian rapprochement during summer 1935, *al-Qabas* highlighted the threats posted by such a German–Italian alliance, 'Hitlir wa-l-isti'mār', *al-Qabas*, 10 October 1935.
- 84 'Mandūbā almāniyā wa ṭṭāliyā yudaḥī'ān 'an sūriyā', *al-Qabas*, 6 February 1933, and 'Sūriyā fī ṣuḥuf almāniyā', *al-Sha'b*, 4 September 1933.
- 85 'Innanā natrukukum li-mūsūlini aw hitlir', *al-Qabas*, 31 May 1935, and 'Iqbalū bi-l-intidāb', *al-Qabas*, 1 October 1935.
- 86 AAPA CGB 58, AA to German missions (decree 82–12 17/3), 23 March 1934.
- 87 AAPA CGB 58, CGB to AA (J.N. 1222), 24 April 1934. The report mentions the existence of a 'very strong Italian-Fascist organization', the 'Casa Italiana' that was open to Italian and local members.
- 88 AAPA R 78425, CGB to AA (J.N. 1399), 'Politischer Bericht', 5 May 1933.
- 89 AAPA CGB 28, AA to CGB, 20 March 1933.
- 90 Ibid.
- 91 Ibid.
- 92 AAPA R 78425, CGB to AA (J.N. 379), 'Politischer Bericht', 3 February 1933, p. 3, and AAPA CGB 57, CGB to AA (J.N. 600), 'Politischer Bericht', 22 February 1933.
- 93 The consulate reported in detail about this exchange with Mubārak (AAPA R 78425, CGB to AA (J.N. 1398), 'Unterredung zwischen Dr. Ruppel und dem maronitischen Erzbischof Mgr. Mubarak', 5 May 1933).
- 94 'Ḥadīth Hanānū ilā al-mandūb al-almānī', *al-Sha'b*, 4 May 1933.
- 95 'Bayān qunṣuliyyat almāniyā', *al-Ahrār*, 5 May 1933, 'Ma 'amila al-duktūr Rūbil?', *al-Nidā*, 5 May 1933, 'Les faits du jour', *L'Orient*, 6 May 1933, and 'Le voyage de M. Ruppel', *La Syrie*, 6 May 1933.
- 96 Ibid.
- 97 'Mandūb almāniyā', *al-Ayyām*, 14 May 1933.
- 98 AAPA R 78425, CGB to AA (J.N. 1399), 'Politischer Bericht', 5 May 1933, p. 7.
- 99 AAPA CGB 57, CGB to AA (J.N. 1563), 'Presseangriff wegen der Reise Ruppel', 19 May 1933.
- 100 Ibid.

- 101 AAPA CGB 28, CGB to AA (J.N. 2148), 'Vortrag Dr. Ellenberg in Beirut', 2 July 1934, p. 2.
- 102 See 'A. 'Abd al-Ghanī, *Almāniyā al-nāziyya wa filasfīn, 1933–1945*, Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1995, p. 216. With regard to the NSDAP/AO in the Levant, cf. H. D. Schmidt, 'The Nazi party in Palestine and the Levant', *International Affairs*, no. 4, 1952, pp. 468–9.
- 103 AAPA CGB 30, CGB to AA (J.N. 2360), 15 November 1935, p. 2.
- 104 See a letter to the Cinéma Alphonse in Beirut that had cancelled the screening of a film after an intervention by the consulate, AAPA CGB 35, CGB to Cinéma Alphonse (Mouakidé), Beirut (J.N. 1313), 27 April 1933, and AAPA CGB 35, CGB to AA (J.N. 1335), 'Aufführung deutschfeindlicher Filme in Beirut', 28 April 1933. Such interventions were not limited to the German side. The film 'Où va l'Allemagne?' was banned by the French authorities due to pro-German reactions that were provoked by the film, see AACP CGB 36, CGB to AA (J.N. 1111), 'Verbot des Filmes "Où va l'Allemagne"', 27 March 1934. A similar incident is recounted by Ḥalīm Sa'īd Abū 'Izz al-Dīn from his memory. Illustrating a 'sympathetic popular stance' with regard to Germany, he remembers a film screening at the AUB featuring one of Hitler's speeches. The audience, 'Izz al-Dīn writes, energetically saluted Hitler and the Germans, provoking the anger of a French general who was in the audience (A. 'Izz al-Dīn, *Tilka-l-ayyām*, p. 76).
- 105 AAPA CGB 35, AA to German missions (decree 83-80 3/3), 3 March 1934.
- 106 AAPA CGB 35, Bucher Cie. (Damascus) to CGB, 'Propagandaschriften', 8 December 1933. The local representative of the consulate in Damascus proposed to translate some of these German pamphlets into Arabic.
- 107 AACP CGB 35, attachment to CGB to AA (J.N. 1220), 17 April 1934.
- 108 AAPA CGB 35, CGB to AA (J.N. 1160), 3 April 1934.
- 109 'Le consulat d'Allemagne proteste', *L'Orient*, 2 April 1933.
- 110 AAPA R 78409, CGB to AA (J.N. 1240), 'Ausländische Greuelpropaganda', 18 April 1933. The consulate was well aware that the Jewish communities in Lebanon and Syria did not pose any relevant threat to German interests in the region; the consul contentedly took note of the fact that the organization of a boycott movement against German goods did not produce any significant results (p. 2).
- 111 This 'dilemma' of Nazi foreign politics is best visible in a confidential decree published by the Reich Ministry of the Interior on 18 April 1935 concerning the 'elimination of damaging impacts of the racial policy on foreign relations of the Reich' (AAPA R78307, AA to German missions (82-35, A. 18/4), 'Ausschaltung schädlicher Rückwirkungen der Rassepolitik auf auswärtige Beziehungen', 17 May 1935). While the racial dogmas were not to be altered even under 'strong foreign political pressure', the practical implementation of these principals was to be 'harmonized with foreign political necessities' (p. 3).
- 112 AAPA CGB 35, CGB to AA (J.N. 835), 'Veröffentlichung des Buches "Mein Kampf" ins Arabische [sic]', 7 March 1934, p. 2. For German debates about possible translations of *Mein Kampf* into Arabic, see S. Wild, 'National Socialism in the Arab Near East between 1933 and 1939', *Die Welt des Islams*, no. 25, 1985, pp. 147–70.
- 113 AAPA CGB 35, CGB to AA (J.N. 835), 'Veröffentlichung des Buches "Mein Kampf" ins Arabische [sic]', 7 March 1934, p. 2.
- 114 AAPA CGB 35, Kamil Mrowa [Murūwa] to AA through CGB, 1 June 1934 (in English). This request was repeated in another letter to the Zentralverlag (AAPA CGB 35, Kamil Mrowa (Beirut) to Zentralverlag der NSDAP (Munich), 8 July 1934).
- 115 AAPA CGB 35, duplicate of letter from Zentralverlag der NSDAP (Munich) to RMVP (Berlin), 30 May 1934.
- 116 AAPA CGB 35, CGB to AA (J.N. 2082), 'Plan der Veröffentlichung einer arabischen Übersetzung des Buches "Mein Kampf" in Buchform', 12 July 1934, p. 3.

- 117 AAPA CGB 35, German Legation Cairo to CGB, 27 October 1934, and AAPA CGB 35, CGB to German Legation Cairo (J.N. 3379), 26 November 1934.
- 118 AAPA CGB 51, CGB to RMVP and AA (J.N. 2724), 25 October 1935. *Kifāh Hitler* was published in May 1935 ('U. Abū Naṣr, *Kifāh Hitler*, Beirut: Maktabat al-Ahliyya, 1935, p. 7). Hitler had – according to Abū Naṣr – given back to the Germans the conviction that 'they are free, strong, and that the world and the future is theirs' (Abū Naṣr, *Kifāh Hitler*, p. 8). The second publication is a collection of articles translated into Arabic ('U. Abū Naṣr, *Hitler al-mur'ib aw bulisuhu al-siyāsī al-mukhīf*, Beirut: Maktabat al-Ahliyya, 1935). See also Wild, *National Socialism*, pp. 148–50.
- 119 The consulate finally submitted to pressures from the Auswärtige Amt, and asked the High Commissioner to ban the booklet (AAPA CGB 51, HC to CGB, 10 January 1936).
- 120 *al-Qabas*, 11 April 1933, quoted in 'A. Hannā, *Al-ḥaraka al-munāhiḍa li-l-fāshiyya fī sūriyā wa lubnān 1933–45*, Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 1974, p. 17. See also 'Al-qabḍ 'alā al-muttaḥam', *al-Nidā'*, 11 April 1933 and 'Al-shuyū'iyūn wa almāniyā', *al-Sha'b*, 12 April 1933.
- 121 'Al-ṭa'n bi Hitler', *al-Nidā'*, 12 April 1933.
- 122 Syrian CP relations with the labour movement in the late 1920s and early 1930s were close, though the CP did not dominate these currents. See J. Couland, *Le mouvement syndical au Liban (1919–1946)*, Paris: Editions Sociales, 1970, pp. 148–55.
- 123 See N. Jazmāṭī, *Al-ḥizb al-shuyū'ī al-sūrī 1924–1958*, Damascus: Maṭba'at Ibn Ḥayyān, 1990, pp. 53–76.
- 124 Jazmāṭī, *Al-ḥizb*, p. 72.
- 125 Cf. M. Rodinson, *Marxism and the Muslim World*, London: Zed Press, 1979, p. 90.
- 126 'A. Turkmānī, *Al-aḥzāb al-shuyū'iyya fī-l-mashriq al-'arabī*, Beirut: Al-Ān Culture, 2002, pp. 546–50.
- 127 Kaylānī, *Al-ḥizb*, pp. 25–31.
- 128 Kaylānī, *Al-ḥizb*, pp. 31–38, and T. Y. Ismael/J. S. Ismael, *The Communist Movement in Syria and Lebanon*, Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1998, p. 25.
- 129 For a brief insight into Khayyāṭa's thought, see Ḥ. Murūwa, 'Al-udabā' wa-l-mufakkirūn al-lubnāniyyūn fī-l-niḍāl ḍidd al-fāshistiyya wa min ajil al-ṣadāqa ma' al-ittiḥād al-sufiyāṭī', *al-Ṭarīq*, no. 4, 1985, pp. 169–70.
- 130 S. Khayyāṭa, *Hummayyāt al-gharb. Jawlāt dirāsiyya. ṣirā' al-jamā'āt fī-l-'ālam al-gharbī*, Beirut: no publisher, 1933, p. 206.
- 131 A. Mādūyān, *Ḥayāt 'alā al-mitrās. dhikrayāt wa mashāhadāt*, Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 1986, pp. 158–60.
- 132 Kaylānī, *Al-ḥizb*, p. 35, Ismael/Ismael, *Communist movement*, p. 21, and Mādūyān, *Ḥayāt*, pp. 139–40. According to 'A. Turkmānī, this conference was part of an international campaign against imperialism and fascism led by Henri Barbusse, Romain Rolland, and Maxime Gorki (Turkmānī, *Al-aḥzāb*, p. 551).
- 133 Since 1930 *al-Duhūr* was edited by Ibrāhīm Ḥaddād, a respected Lebanese socialist intellectual. Regular contributors were such different writers as the liberal nationalist Amīn al-Rīḥānī, the future founder of the Ba'th party, Mīshāl 'Aflaq, and the Marxist thinker Ra'īf Khūrī. See M. Dakrūb, 'Fī masīrat 'al-ṭarīq' – tārikh wa marāḥil', *al-Ṭarīq*, no. 1, 2002, p. 261.
- 134 Turkmānī, *Al-aḥzāb*, pp. 294–295, and Kaylānī, *Al-ḥizb*, pp. 37–8 and 43–4.
- 135 Speech held by F. Ḥilū at the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in Moscow, July 1935, reproduced on Free Arab Voice ([www.freearabvoice.org](http://www.freearabvoice.org)).
- 136 Speech held by Kh. Bakdāsh at the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in Moscow, July 1935, reproduced on Free Arab Voice ([www.freearabvoice.org](http://www.freearabvoice.org)).
- 137 Salīm Khayyāṭa contributed another extensive work in which he dealt with Italian ambitions in Abyssinia: S. Khayyāṭa, *Al-ḥabasha al-maḥlūma*, Beirut: Rawḍa al-Funūn, 1935.

- 138 M. Zamir, *Lebanon's quest. The road to statehood 1926–1939*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2000, pp. 120–21, and K. M. Firro, *Inventing Lebanon. Nationalism and the State under the Mandate*, London: I. Tauris, 2003, p. 128.
- 139 These conflicts were carefully noted by the consulate, see AAPA R78425, CGB to AA (J.N. 954), 'Politischer Bericht', 24 March 1933.
- 140 AAPA CGB 65, CGB to AA (J.N. 1149), 'Die maronitische Zeitung L'Information', 8 April 1933. Mubārak made these remarks in a meeting with the German Consul General Ziemke. Ziemke had approached Mubārak to protest against an article in *L'Information* about anti-Jewish persecutions in Germany; the newspaper, though not directly bound to the Archbishop, was considered close to Mubārak. The article, Mubārak asserted, must have been written by a 'French Jew'; personally, Mubārak reportedly added, he understood and approved the German position towards the Jews.
- 141 AAPA R78425, CGB to AA (J.N. 1398), 'Unterredung zwischen Dr. Ruppel und dem maronitischen Erzbischof Mgr. Mubarak', 5 May 1933, p. 1.
- 142 Ibid, p. 2.
- 143 A. B. 'Arīḍa, *Al-risāla al-ra'awiyya fī al-rūḥ al-'ālamīyya wa al-rūḥ al-dīniyya* (20 May 1933), Beirut: Maṭba'at al-Murāsīlīn, 1933. These statements by the Patriarch were reported in *L'Orient*, 13 June 1933. In his pastoral letter, 'Arīḍa explicitly voiced sympathy for those 'poor [German] Jews, who are free of any sin other than being Jewish', 'Arīḍa, *Al-risāla*, p. 6. Earlier, on 20 May, 'Arīḍa had addressed a personal letter to Maurice Sidi, the head of the Alliance Israélite in Beirut, expressing his sympathies for the persecuted German Jews. See 'Il Patriarca Maronita per gli Ebrei tedeschi', *Oriente Moderno*, no. 6, June 1933, p. 348.
- 144 See for instance 'Risālat al-batrīrk 'Arīḍa', *al-Nidā'*, 10 June 1933, 'Al-batrīrk wa-l-yahūd', *al-Ayyām*, 14 June 1933, *al-Dabbūr*, 12 June 1933, and 'Al-batrīrk wa banū isrā'īl', *al-Ṣiḥāfī al-Tā'ih*, 1 July 1933. Expressing concern that sympathies for German Jews might be used for Zionist propaganda, *al-Nidā'* voiced sharp criticism against the Patriarch's pastoral letter. The letter was an attack on Arab unity and independence, the paper declared: '[W]hile this sympathy might be acceptable from a religious point of view, it is not acceptable from a nationalist one.' ('Al-khaṭar al-sahyuni', *al-Nidā'*, 23 June 1933) In a reply to his critics, 'Arīḍa denied any connection between the crisis in Germany and the conflict in Palestine: 'I know the situation in Palestine very well, but what hinders a human being to have compassion with his human brother? Therefore we expressed our sympathy for the situation of the Jews in Germany.' ('Bkirkī wa banū isrā'īl', *al-Ṣiḥāfī al-Tā'ih*, 13 June 1933)
- 145 AAPA R30633, CGB to AA (J.N. 2137), 'Zerwürfnis zwischen dem maronitischen Patriarchen Arida und Erzbischof Moubarak', 7 July 1933, p. 1. Although the letter was publicly refuted by Mubārak, the consulate considered the letter authentic. See also 'Risālat muṭrān mubārak', *al-Nidā'*, 30 June 1933, and 'Incidente fra l'Arcivescovo di Beirut e il Patriarca maronita', *Oriente Moderno*, no. 8, August 1933, p. 407.
- 146 Khoury, *Syria*, p. 388, and S. Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate*, London: Oxford University Press, 1958, p. 194.
- 147 AAPA CGB 58, CGB to AA (J.N. 1610), 'Blutige Unruhen in Tripoli', 18 June 1935, p. 2.
- 148 AAPA R78425, CGB to AA (J.N. 831), 'Politischer Bericht', 6 March 1934, p. 2.
- 149 Ibid., p. 4.
- 150 A. al-Sayyāf, *Shu'ā' qabl al-fajr: mudhakkirāt Aḥmad Nahād al-Sayyāf*, no place or publisher, 2005, p. 78.
- 151 Ibid.
- 152 Ibid., p. 79.
- 153 W. Cleveland, *Islam against the West. Shakib Arslan and the campaign for Islamic nationalism*, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1985, p. 139.



- 154 Sh. Arslān, 'Qu'est-ce que vous voulez qu'un homme d'Etat français dise de Guillaume II', *La Nation Arabe*, no. 4, March–April 1935, p. 255.
- 155 Cleveland states: 'Arslān was arguably the most widely read Arab writer of the inter-war period', Cleveland, *Islam*, p. xxi. *La Nation Arabe* was edited by Arslān in cooperation with Ihsān al-Jābirī. With regard to the journal and its function, see A.-C. de Gayffier-Bonneville, 'Renaissance Arabe et solidarité musulmane dans La Nation Arabe', in *Débats intellectuels au Moyen-Orient dans l'Entre-deux-guerres. Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 95–8, Aix-en-Provence: Edisud, 2002. See also M. Kramer, *Arab Awakening and Islamic Revival. The Politics of Ideas in the Middle East*, New Jersey: Transaction Publisher, 1996, pp. 103–10.
- 156 Cleveland, *Islam*, p. 68.
- 157 Sha'ib, *Al-ṣirā'*, p. 88.
- 158 Ibid., p. 95.
- 159 See *ibid.*, p. 97.
- 160 AAPA CGB 60, CGB to AA (J.N. 1206), 'Brief Emir Schekib Arslan an Großmufti von Jerusalem', 8 May 1935. See also Cleveland, *Islam*, pp. 147–9, and Sha'ib, *Al-ṣirā'*, pp. 100–102.
- 161 AAPA R30633, AA to RAM, 7 November 1934, pp. 1–2.
- 162 AAPA R30633, Note by AA to Ministerialdirektor AA, 12 November 1934.
- 163 Cf. AAPA R78435, AA to Reichsstelle für Devisenbewirtschaftung, 17 January 1935.
- 164 Cleveland, *Islam*, p. 138. French intelligence noted that the number of *La Nation Arabe* that was published following Arslān's visit to Rome and Berlin was 'consacrée à la glorification de l'Allemagne et de l'Italie', see CAOM 3435 d. 3, Etat-Major de l'Armée, 'Bulletin de renseignements des questions musulmanes', 8 February 1935, p. 26.
- 165 'Partito politico segreto in Siria', *Oriente Moderno*, no. 12, December 1935, pp. 633–4. News about Sa'āda's arrest and the existence of his party resounded in Syria as well. See A. Ḥūrānī, *Mudhakkirāt akram ḥūrānī – vol. I*, Cairo: Maktabat Madbūlī, 2000, p. 143.
- 166 AAPA R78425, CGB to General Secretary of HC (J.N. 3186), 11 December 1935, and AAPA R78425, Cabinet Politique de HC, 19 December 1935. According to the German consul, the French response to his letter indicated that his clarification 'psychologically' helped to overcome the deep mistrust on the French side; he had stressed Germany's 'loyalty' towards the French Mandate authorities, AAPA R78425, CGB to AA (J.N. 3269), 'Politischer Bericht', 20 December 1935, p. 2. During spring 1935, the consulate had in fact been approached in the name of the SNP, inquiring whether the consulate would be willing to train and arm members of the movement. This request was turned down, see AAPA R78425, CGB to AA (J.N. 3018), 'Aufdeckung einer umstürzlerischen Bewegung', 22 November 1935, p. 3. An internal inquiry of the NSDAP/AO concluded that none of the party members in Beirut had entertained any relations with Sa'āda (AAPA CGB 151, NSDAP/AO (Beirut), 'Tätigkeitsbericht für den Monat November 1935', 8 December 1935, p. 4).
- 167 AAPA R78425, CGB to AA (J.N. 330), 'Prozess gegen die verhafteten Mitglieder der syrischen Volkspartei', 10 February 1936.
- 168 The question of existing relationships between Sa'āda and the German and Italian consulate is at the centre of a brief study by Jān Dāyya, see J. Dāyya, *Sa'āda wa-l-nāziya*, Beirut: Fajr al-Nahḍa, 1994. See also A. Fawaz, *Nazi influence on the Syrian Social Nationalist Thought*, unpublished thesis submitted to the American University of Beirut, 1960, and 'A. Yāziji, *Adwā' alā fikr Sa'āda*. Beirut: Bisān, 1997, pp. 93–96.
- 169 The French authorities called the party 'Parti Populaire Syrien' (PPS). In 1947, the party changed its name to 'Syrian Social Nationalist Party' (SSNP). See L. Z. Yamak, *The Syrian Social Nationalist Party. An ideological analysis*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966, p. 167.

- 170 For Sa'āda's biography, see C. Schumann, 'Symbolische Aneignungen. Antun Sa'adas Radikalnationalismus in der Epoche des Faschismus', in G. Höpp/P. Wien/R. Wildangel (eds), *Blind für die Geschichte? Arabische Begegnungen mit dem Nationalsozialismus*, Berlin: Hans Schiler Verlag, 2004, pp. 158–61, and B. Tibi, *Vom Gottesreich zum Nationalstaat. Islam und panarabischer Nationalismus*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1987, pp. 180–82. While Tibi explicitly describes Sa'āda as 'Germanophile' (p. 183), Sa'āda's fascination for Germany is neglected in most other studies. Longrigg states that Sa'āda was 'educated partly in Germany' (Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon*, p. 225), but, according to the evidence, this information is wrong. See also J. Dāyya, *Muḥākamāt Anṭūn Sa'āda*, Beirut: Fajr al-Nahḍa, 2002, pp. 68–81.
- 171 A. Sa'āda, 'Al-khiṭāb al-manhajī al-awwal', in *Al-a'māl al-kāmila. al-juz' al-thani 1932–1936*, Beirut: Dār Sa'āda, 2000, p. 102. Here, as in other texts as well, the editors have added the adjective 'social' to the name of the party. The original text obviously only referred to the contemporary name of the party: 'Syrian Nationalist Party'.
- 172 Ibid., p. 104.
- 173 A. Sa'āda, 'Al-siyāsa al-urūbiyya – almāniyā dawla wa umma', *al-Majalla*, February 1924, p. 210.
- 174 A. Sa'āda, 'Mabādi'asāsiyya fī-l-tarbiyya al-qawmiyya', *al-Majalla*, March 1933, p. 25.
- 175 Ibid., p. 33.
- 176 For an analysis of this literature, see C. Schumann, *Radikalnationalismus in Syrien und Libanon. Politische Sozialisation und Elitenbildung 1930–1958*, Hamburg: Deutsches Orient Institut, 2001. Akram Hūrānī, who in 1936 had himself joined the SNP, emphasized that from the point of view of its supporters, the party's allusions to the NSDAP in style and organization were no reason for concern. Quite to the contrary, given the wide-spread fascination for Hitler, these allusions added to the party's popularity (Hūrānī, *Mudhakkirāt*, p. 192).
- 177 'A. Qubruṣī, 'Abdallāh Qubruṣī yatadhakkir – vol. I, Beirut: Mu'assasa Fikr li-l-Abḥāth wa-l-Nashr, 1982, p. 26.
- 178 Yamak, *Party*, p. 112.
- 179 Dāyya, *Muḥākamāt*, p. 121.
- 180 Qubruṣī, *Qubruṣī*, p. 30. See also Dāyya, *Muḥākamāt*, pp. 126–31.
- 181 Sa'āda, *Al-khiṭāb*, p. 104.

### 3 Nazism and the Levant – Nazism in the Levant: between treaty negotiations and the Second World War (1936–1939)

- 1 'Al-qumṣān al-ḥadīdiyya lā fāshistiyya wa lā nāziyya, bal qūwa li-l-iṣlāḥ!', *al-Sha'b*, 23 September 1936.
- 2 M. Grandjouan, 'Le scoutisme chez les musulmans', in *Entretiens sur l'évolution des pays de civilisation arabe*. Communication d'une réunion à Paris, Juillet 1936, Paris: Centre d'Etudes de Politique Etrangère, 1937, p. 107.
- 3 Ibid., p. 111.
- 4 Jennifer Dueck provides a detailed account of the various influences that had shaped the local scout movement since the First World War, J. Dueck, *Competing for Culture in a Levantine Mosaic. Œuvres de propagande in Syria and Lebanon, 1936–1946*, PhD thesis submitted to University of Oxford, 2005, pp. 202–24.
- 5 This is the title given to a sub chapter in S. Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate*, London: Oxford University Press, 1958, p. 225. Cf. also CAOM Memoire 715, Robert Montagne, 'L'évolution de la jeunesse arabe', 31 June 1937.
- 6 In English publications, the organization is also referred to as 'Steel Shirts'. French publications generally use the term 'Chemises de fer'.

- 7 F. Barūdī, 'Nashāt al-shabāb fī kull makān', *al-Muṣawwar*, 1 July 1937, p. 5.
- 8 See P. Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate. The politics of Arab nationalism 1920–1945*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987, pp. 406–7.
- 9 CAOM 3435 d. 4, Bulletin de renseignements des questions musulmans, 14 August 1936, p. 53, K. D. Watenpaugh, 'Steel Shirts, white badges and the last qabaday. Fascism, urban violence and civic identity in Aleppo under French rule', in N. Méouchy (ed.), *France, Syrie et Liban 1918–1946. Les ambiguïtés et les dynamiques de la relation mandataire*, Damascus: Institut français d'études arabes de Damas, 2002, p. 327, and Dueck, *Competing for Culture*, pp. 238–40.
- 10 E. Thompson, *Colonial Citizens. Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, pp. 192–4, and Khoury, *Syria*, pp. 474–5.
- 11 M. O'Zoux, 'Les insignes et saluts de la jeunesse en Syrie et au Liban', in *Entretiens sur l'évolution des pays de civilisation arabe*. Communication d'une réunion à Paris, Juillet 1937, Paris: Centre d'études de politique étrangère, 1938, p. 99, and Khoury, *Syria*, p. 475.
- 12 The Roman salute was used in different countries until the 1930s, only to be later associated with fascism.
- 13 See Watenpaugh, 'Steel Shirts', pp. 330–31.
- 14 M. 'Ajlānī, 'Aqbariyyat al-tanzīm', *al-Jazīra*, 29 July 1935, reprinted in: M. 'Ajlānī, *Awraq*, Damascus: Maṭba'at al-Qabas, 1946, p. 61.
- 15 F. Barūdī [?], 'Kayfa nazẓama al-mustashār Hitlir al-shabāb al-almānī?', *al-Muṣawwar*, 1 July 1937, p. 12.
- 16 Ibid., p. 12.
- 17 Watenpaugh, 'Steel Shirts', pp. 336–9, and Khoury, *Syria*, p. 470.
- 18 Watenpaugh, 'Steel Shirts', pp. 341–5.
- 19 Regarding the political context of the creation of the Phalangists, see Sh. Juḥā, *Ma'raka maṣīr lubnān fī 'ahd al-intidāb al-firansī 1918–1946 – al-juz' al-thānī*, Beirut: Maktabat Ra's Bayrūt, 1995, pp. 676–7.
- 20 *Tārīkh ḥizb al-katā'ib al-lubnāniyya. al-juz' al-awwal 1936–1940*, Beirut: Dār al-'Amal, no date, p. 100. He was accompanied by Husayn Sija'ān, 'Abd al-Stār Trāblūsī, and Rashād al-Barbīr.
- 21 See R. al-Barbīr, 'Un Libanais aux jeux Olympiques', *Le Jour*, 9 August 1936.
- 22 The consulate was also approached for accreditation at the *Kraft durch Freude* conference, which was to take place in summer 1936 (AAPA CGB 43, CGB to AA (J.N. 151), 21 January 1936).
- 23 AAPA CGB 43, Abdallah Dabbous (Directeur École Siddik, Beirut) to CGB, 13 June 1936.
- 24 R. al-Barbīr, 'Un Libanais aux jeux Olympiques', *Le Jour*, 9 August 1936.
- 25 R. al-Barbīr, 'Après les jeux', *Le Jour*, 15 September 1936. The subtitle of this article reads 'Leçons à tirer pour le Liban'.
- 26 'A. Ḥabbāl, 'Ḥayāt al-mukhayyam al-hitliri', *al-Nahār*, 29 July 1936, and 'A. Ḥabbāl, 'Hitlir ma'būd al-almān', *Bayrūt*, 16 August 1936.
- 27 'Al-nashāt al-almānī al-nāzī', *Abābīl*, 21 September 1936.
- 28 See Gemayel in *al-Bashīr*, 6 February 1937 (quoted in Juḥā, *Ma'raka – I*, p. 685).
- 29 Gemayel in an interview with *Bayrūt*, 16 September 1936 (quoted in *Tārīkh al-ḥizb*, p. 101).
- 30 See R. Haddad, *Les Phalanges Libanaises. De leur fondation à l'indépendance du Liban 1936–1943*, Beirut: Édition Charlemagne, 1993, pp. 24–34, and Juḥā, *Ma'raka – II*, pp. 678–81.
- 31 Juḥā, *Ma'raka – II*, pp. 681–4, and J. P. Entelis, 'Belief-system and ideology-formation in the Lebanese Katā'ib party', *International Journal for Middle Eastern Studies*, no. 4, 1973, pp. 154–5.

- 32 This aspect of Phalangist nationalism is considered by Sāghhiyya and Mendel/Müller as a significant difference to the expansionist ambitions implied in Fascist and National Socialist nationalist conceptions. In addition, Mendel/Müller argue that only in its early years the party followed an authoritarian concept of society; yet, it began to rework its outlook in the early 1940s and started to place a greater emphasis on the rights of the individual (M. Mendel and Z. Müller, 'Fascist tendencies in the Levant in the 1930s and 1940s', *Archiv Orientalni*, no. 55, 1987, p. 13). See also H. Sāghhiyya, *Tā'rīb al-katā'ib al-lubnāniyya. al-ḥizb, al-sulṭa, al-khawf*, Beirut: Dār al-Jadīd, 1991, pp. 99–103.
- 33 K. Pakradouni, 'Structure des Kataeb', *al-Amal*, no. 3, 1977, p. 7.
- 34 Haddad, *Phalanges*, p. 138.
- 35 Declaration by Gemayel, 25 May 1938 (quoted in Haddad, *Phalanges*, p. 131).
- 36 See for rebuttals of such accusations Juḥā, *Ma'raka – II*, pp. 700–702.
- 37 Juḥā, *Ma'raka – II*, pp. 655–7.
- 38 Dueck, *Competing for Culture*, p. 218. Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Nuṣūlī served as a link between these schools and the various Muslim youth organizations. It is interesting to note that 'Ārif al-Ḥabbāl, who had visited camps of the Hitler Youth in Germany and the Olympic Games in 1935 and 1936, was a teacher at a Beirut Maqāsīd school. Husayn Sijā'ān, who took part in the delegation to the soccer conference in Berlin in 1936, was to assume a leading function in *Najjāda* in 1943.
- 39 Juḥā, *Ma'raka – II*, pp. 657–60.
- 40 Ibid., p. 658.
- 41 R. El-Solh, *Lebanon and Arabism. National identity and state formation*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2004, pp. 29–30. Sh. Juḥā, *Al-ḥaraka al-'arabiyya al-sirriyya. Jamā'at al-kitāb al-āḥmar: 1935–1945*, Beirut: al-Furāt, 2004, pp. 31–6, and M. Rayyis, *Al-kitāb al-dhahabī li-l-thawrāt al-waṭaniyya fī-l-mashriq al-'arabī. thawrat filasṭīn 'ām 1936*, Damascus: Maṭābi' Alif Bā', 1976, pp. 103–5.
- 42 According to the files of the party, a party-cell existed in Berlin under the leadership of Darwīsh al-Miqdādī, see Juḥā, *Al-ḥaraka*, pp. 49, 335–7. Miqdādī also served as president of the Arab Club in Berlin, see Sh. Arslān, 'Une Soirée au Club Arabe de Berlin', *La Nation Arabe*, no. 18–19, 1938, p. 1005. For Miqdādī, who was of Palestinian origin and an alumnus of the American University of Beirut, see C. E. Dawn, 'An Arab nationalist view of world politics and history in the interwar period: Darwīsh al-Miqdādī', in U. Dann (ed.), *The Great Powers in the Middle East, 1919–1939*, New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1988. Although Dawn does not relate to Miqdādī's stay in Germany, he highlights some changes in Miqdādī's 'Semitic wave theory' that have to be seen in the context of his encounters with Nazi German thought (p. 359).
- 43 Juḥā, *Al-ḥaraka*, pp. 71–2.
- 44 Ibid., pp. 103–14.
- 45 Ibid., pp. 67–9 and 126–7.
- 46 Rayyis, *Al-kitāb – I*, pp. 104–6, and Juḥā, *Al-ḥaraka*, p. 122. Juḥā states that the alumni organization was created in early 1935; according to French intelligence reports, the association was formed following a visit of German consul Seiler to Damascus, offering support to its members (CAOM 3435 d. 4, Bulletin de renseignements des questions musulmanes, 12 March 1936, p. 51). See also Khoury, *Syria*, p. 565.
- 47 In addition to Imām, six other medical doctors and lawyers, among them 'Abd al-Latif al-Bīsār from Tripolis, were suggested by the consulate to be invited to the conference. See CGB 43, GCB to AA (J.N. 2844), 4 December 1935, and CGB 43, Imam to Seiler, 23 February 1936. A report of an unnamed member of a group that had visited Germany for two months in summer 1936 is preserved in the files of the French High Commissioner in Beirut; most probably, this group is identical with the one led by Imām. The member explicitly expressed his fascination for the state of German

- society (Nantes 629, HCB to MAE, 'A/S propagande allemande', 18 September 1936, attached report, p. 1). P. Khoury mentions as a 'first scrap of evidence linking Dr. Imam to Nazi Germany', without further specification, that Imām had visited Germany in 1936 accompanied by six Syrian students, obviously referring to the very same visit (Khoury, *Syria*, p. 565).
- 48 On 20 April 1937, Imām had sent – together with Dr Istuany, another founding member of the alumni association – a telegram to the local branch of the NSDAP/AO, stating: 'On the occasion of the anniversary of the Führer, we wish the noble German people and its Führer additional successes [in their efforts] to preserve peace.' (AAPA CGB 151, NSDAP/AO Beirut to NSDAP/AO Berlin, 20 April 1937) A similar telegram was sent earlier on 29 January 1937 on the occasion of the fourth anniversary of Hitler's takeover. Imām, writing on behalf of the association, concluded the letter with 'German–Arab wishes' (AAPA CGB 151, Imam to NSDAP/AO Beirut, 29 January 1937).
- 49 See e.g. AAPA CGB 151, NSDAP/AO Beirut to NSDAP/AO (Berlin), 13 August 1935.
- 50 With regard to the coverage of Schacht's visit, see AAPA CGB 28, CGB to AA (J.N. 2155), 28 November 1936. Local reactions to the visit were summarized in AAPA CGB 28, CGB to AA (J.N. 2162), 'Politischer Bericht', 13 December 1937.
- 51 Seiler insisted in a letter to the German AA that there was no basis whatsoever to these rumours. The local press ran various articles about the visit and von Schirach's supposed contacts to the club. See e.g., 'Za'im al-shabāb al-almānī fī dimashq', *al-Nahār*, 3 December 1937, M. Afflak, 'Le Führer de la jeunesse hitlérienne à Damas', *La Chronique*, 3 December 1937, 'Qu'est allé faire à Damas M. Baldur von Schirach?', *L'Orient*, 7 December 1937, and 'La guerre dans l'ombre', *La Syrie*, 17 December 1937. Noteworthy is the fact that Sh. Juḥā also mentions von Schirach's assumed contacts to the club and the ANP. Juḥā himself was a member of the ANP (See Juḥā, *Al-ḥaraka*, p. 194).
- 52 Munīr al-Rayyis attributed these criticisms of the club to the League of National Action, which considered the club as a competitor. Rayyis writes that those who opposed the Arab Club related to it in public as 'al-nazī al-'arabī', i.e. the 'Arab Nazi', Rayyis, *Al-kitāb* – I, p. 106. Other reports mention the nickname 'al-nādī al-nāzī', the 'Nazi Club', see G. Pharès, 'De Georges Pharès au sous-führer-dentiste Said Fattah al-Imam', *Les Echos de Syrie*, 10 May 1939.
- 53 See the letter from the British consul in Damascus to the British Foreign Office of 2 January 1939, reprinted in M. G. Fry and I. Rabinovich, *Despatches from Damascus. Gilbert MacKereth and British Policy in the Levant 1933–39*, Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1985, p. 200. A report of the Sûreté Général of December 1937 stated that the supposed 'principes Nazistes' of the Arab Club had encouraged members of the League of National Action to support a rapprochement to the Club (Nantes 1921, SG (Beirut), 'A/S Ligue d'Action Nationale', December 18, 1937).
- 54 AAPA CGB 60, letter to CGB, 29 April 1939. Referring to an unnamed informant, the German consulate reported that the British consul in Damascus, MacKereth, had provided the following information to a journalist: in early 1937, Imām had met a high-ranking German personality in Basra where he had received the offer of financial support. This support was supposed to flow via the commissioning of German goods, which were to be sold in Syria to the profit of the club. The local Syrian representative of the German company Telefunken was suggested as a candidate to handle this trade. In addition, the editor of *Les Echos de Syrie*, George Pharès, was said to have clandestinely distributed bandages carrying the swastika, which had provoked French suspicions about an assumed German propaganda offensive. According to the German report, Pharès had apparently acted on behalf of the British consul to fuel German–French tensions.

- 55 AAPA CGB 28, CGB to AA (J.N. 2162), 'Politischer Bericht', 13 December 1937, p. 2.
- 56 For the following, see Khoury, *Syria*, pp. 457–62, and Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon*, pp. 215–18.
- 57 Fry/Rabinovich, *Despatches*, p. 123. See also a report sent by the German consul to the Auswärtige Amt: AAPA R78425, CGB to AA (J.N. 366), 'Aufbruch in Syrien', 15 February 1936.
- 58 N. al-Rayyis, 'Love of the nation, not Bolshevism', *al-Qabs*, 11 February 1936 (attached in a German translation to AAPA R78425, CGB to AA (J.N. 357), 'Syr. Protest gegen Beschuldigung kommunist. Einflußnahme auf nat. Bewegung', 14 February 1936). See also 'Ṣaḥīfa almāniyya wa ḥarakāt sūriyā al-akhīra', *al-Sha'b*, 4 February 1936.
- 59 AAPA R78425, CGB to AA (J.N. 357), 'Syr. Protest gegen Beschuldigung kommunist. Einflußnahme auf nat. Bewegung', 14 February 1936, pp. 1–2.
- 60 The Palestinian rebellion further added to Amīn al-Ḥusaynī's reputation in Syria and Lebanon. Already in August 1935, Ḥusaynī had visited Syria and Lebanon and had met with several local nationalist leaders. This visit was widely covered in the press, see also 'Visita di Amin el-Huseini alla Siria e sue ragioni politiche', *Oriente Moderno*, no. 10, 1935, pp. 511–12.
- 61 The British consul reported on 22 April 1936 to the British High Commissioner in Jerusalem: 'I learn that they [the leaders of the National Bloc] decided while openly sympathizing with Palestinian Arabs to counsel confidentially curtailment of present agitation in Palestine lest it affects their own treaty negotiations in Paris. They particularly desire on political grounds avoidance of any major incident with British at present time.' (Fry/Rabinovich, *Despatches*, p. 150) It should be noted, however, that at least until summer 1936 representatives of the Zionist movement had stressed that an agreement with Syrian nationalists was anything but impossible (CZA S25/199, 'The Arabian–Jewish problem and the Syrian nationalists', 1936, p. 2).
- 62 For Syrian reactions to the revolt, see Khoury, *Syria*, pp. 540–46.
- 63 Juḥā, *Al-ḥaraka*, p. 133.
- 64 Although the congress was not open to non-Arab international observers, the press officer of the NSDAP/AO in Beirut managed to attend the conference through his personal contacts to some of the organizers (AAPA CGB 151, NSDAP/AO (Beirut) to NSDAP/AO (Berlin), 'Palästina-Teilungsplan', 16 September 1937). Ḥallāq notes that the congress was not motivated by religious, i.e. Muslim, sentiments towards Palestine, but was instead based on Arab nationalist demands of Muslims and Christians alike, see Ḥ. Ḥallāq, *Mawqif lubnān min al-qaḍiyya al-filasṭīniyya 1918–1952*, Amman: Dār al-Shurūq, 2002, p. 47.
- 65 Cf. Khoury, *Syria*, pp. 554–5.
- 66 Nantes 647, SG (Beirut), Information 3479, 'A/S Boycottage des marchandises juives', 24 September 1936.
- 67 Nantes 647, Cabinet Politique, 'A/S propagande antisioniste', 3 July 1936.
- 68 Nantes 647, SG (Beirut), Information 1885, 'A/S boycottage des marchandises juives', 28 May 1936. See also Nantes 1920, SG (Beirut), 'A/S congrès du Bloudan', 15 September 1937, referring to earlier incidents in 1936.
- 69 Arab Higher Committee, *Bayān wa dhikrā*, Beirut: Maṭba'at al-Kashshāf, 1937, p. 2.
- 70 Ibid., p. 4.
- 71 Ibid., p. 5.
- 72 Nantes 1920, SG (Beirut), 'A/S aggression anti-minoritaire', 13 September 1937.
- 73 Nantes 1920, SG (Beirut), 'A/S d'une bombe qui a explosé place de Bab al-Faradj', 11 September 1937.
- 74 Nantes 614, HC (Beirut) to Minister of Foreign Affairs (Paris), 'Menace à l'adresse des communautés juives du Proche-Orient', 11 October 1938.

- 75 Nantes 615, Nabīh al-‘Aẓma to ‘Comité sioniste’ [Jewish Agency] (Jerusalem), 8 October 1938.
- 76 Nantes 648, SEL, ‘Activité étrangère au Proche-Orient’, January 1938. See also F. Barūdī, *Awraq wa mudhakkirāt Fakhrī al-Barūdī 1887–1966 – al-qism al-thānī*, Damascus: Manshurāt Wizārat al-Thaqāfa, 1999, pp. 136–8.
- 77 Cf. Nantes 648, AF Rome to MAE, ‘A/S l’Italie et les événements en Palestine’, 20 October 1937, and for a more general insight into Italian propaganda and the events in Palestine: M. A. Williams, *Mussolini’s Propaganda Abroad. Subversion in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, 1935–1940*, London: Routledge, 2006, pp. 63–89. British officials in Amman, e.g., reported that the Jordanian participants at the convention had received money from Italian sources that was to be handed over to Nabīh al-‘Aẓma, head of the Palestine Defence Committee (A. L. P. Burdett (ed.), *Islamic Movements in the Arab World 1913–1966*, vol. III, London: Archive Editions, 1998, p. 180). Other reports pointed to similar transfers of money to Palestinian rebels through the intermediation of ‘Aẓma (Nantes 648, HC, Information No. 35, ‘A/S propagande italienne’, 9 May 1938).
- 78 AAPA CGB 60, CGB to AA, ‘Die syrische Presse über Mussolini’, 1 April 1937.
- 79 Nantes 648, MAE to AF Rome, ‘A/S l’Italie et les affaires de Palestine’, 17 November 1937, p. 2.
- 80 Ibid., p. 3.
- 81 Nantes 629, HC to MAE, ‘A/S propagande italienne dans les territoires sous mandat’, 5 June 1936, p. 2.
- 82 Nantes 629, HC to MAE, ‘A/S Parti Populaire Syrien’, 10 July 1936, p. 3.
- 83 Nantes 629, HC to MAE, ‘A/S propagande italienne dans les territoires sous mandat’, 5 June 1936, p. 2.
- 84 See also J. Honvault, ‘La Coopération nationaliste avec le pouvoir mandataire. Ambiguïtés et éthique politique chez l’émir ‘Ādil Arslān lors des négociations d’Ankara sur le sandjak d’Alexandrette’, in N. Méouchy (ed.), *France, Syrie et Liban 1918–1946. Les ambiguïtés et les dynamiques de la relation mandataire*, Damascus: Institut français d’études arabes de Damas, 2002, pp. 211–27.
- 85 Letter by ‘Ādil Arslān (Geneva) to Prüfer (AA), 18 August 1937 (HP).
- 86 During his stay in Baghdad, contacts with Grobba were frequent. According to Arslān’s own account, their friendship went back to 1920, ‘A. Arslān, *Mudhakkirāt al-amīr ‘Ādil Arslān – al-juz’ al-awwal, 1934–1945*, Beirut: al-Dār al-Taḡaddumiyya, 1983, p. 2. In the post-war years, Arslān had spent some time in Germany. See also pp. 43–4.
- 87 Arslān’s diary is a good source to assess the impact of anti-Semitic stereotypes during these years. Noteworthy is Arslān’s entry following the *Reichspogromnacht* on 12 November 1938. Referring to the state-initiated pogrom in Germany, Arslān remarked: ‘It is this brutal policy in Germany that is creating supporters of the Jews all around the world, even among those classes that had entertained hatred for the Jews. German persecution of the Jews is one of the reasons why people sympathize with the Jews, and it is an argument why these people [the Jews] need a refuge where it can be free – and this refuge is Palestine. A reasonable enemy is better than an ignorant friend.’ (Arslān, *Mudhakkirāt*, p. 188). See also Ḥ. Sāghiyā, *Qawmiyyū al-mashriq al-‘arabī. min Drayfus ilā Ghārūdī*, Beirut: Riad El-Rayyes Books, 2000, pp. 170–77.
- 88 Already in 1935, Arslān mentioned encounters with Jewish fellow travellers on an Italian ship. Based on these encounters he concluded: ‘If Hitler would change his policy towards German Jews, not a dozen of them would emigrate to Palestine.’ (Arslān, *Mudhakkirāt*, p. 93)
- 89 A French report from Beirut noted: ‘L’antisémitisme qui sévit en Allemagne facilite singulièrement la tâche des agents de propagande allemande, et le mécontentement des Pays Arabes au sujet de la question palestinienne la facilite encore davantage. Il est vrai que de nombreux patriotes musulmans dans les pays Arabes mettent leurs

compatriotes en garde contre les progrès du nazisme et leur font comprendre que le plus l'antisémitisme sévit en Occident, le plus dévient difficile le règlement de la question palestinienne, car le seule refuge pour les Juifs traqués en Europe est la Palestine Foyer National. En d'autres termes, ces patriotes essaient de faire comprendre à leurs compatriotes que les Nazis, en combattant les Juifs en Allemagne, encouragent et fortifient leur position par rapport à la Palestine. Mais, les passions l'emportent, et l'Arabe impulsif applaudit aux excès du nazisme en Allemagne, pour la seule raison que ce sentiment de l'antisémitisme répond et fait écho à son propre sentiment par rapport à la Palestine.' (Nantes 673, Délégué de HCF auprès de la République Libanaise (Beyrouth) à HC, 'L'intensification de la propagande Allemande en Orient', 17 August 1938, p. 1)

- 90 'A. 'Abd al-Ghanī, *Almāniyā al-nāziyya wa filasṭīn, 1933–1945*, Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1995, pp. 219–20. As a leader of the struggles against Zionism and Britain, Qawuqjī had gained strong sympathies in the Arab public. Munīr al-Rayyis recounts in his memoirs that during the Nabī Musa festivities in 1937, peasants were seen with pictures showing Qawuqjī, Hitler, and Mussolini – much to the annoyance of Ḥusaynī. Tensions between Ḥusaynī and Qawuqjī that were to pop up during the following years went back to these conflicts during the Palestinian revolt. See M. al-Rayyis, *Al-kitāb al-dhahabī li-l-thawrāt al-waṭaniyya fī-l-mashriq al-'arabī. ḥarb al-'irāq 'ām 1941*, Damascus: Maṭābī' Alif Bā', 1977, p. 102.
- 91 Qawuqjī insisted that 'in the end, the revolt is not directed against the British – with whom the Arabs have always entertained friendly relations – but against the Jews in Palestine, among whom there are many communists.' (BArchiv AA F15203, GLB (Grobba) to AA (Nr. 3121), 17 December 1936 (HP), p. 8)
- 92 'Abd al-Ghanī, *Almāniyā al-nāziyya*, p. 221, and Hirszowicz, *The Third Reich and the Arab East*, London: Routledge, 1966, p. 35.
- 93 Imām was provided with formal letters of recommendation by Fu'ād Khalīl Mufarrij, Secretary General of the Arab National Office for Research and Information, and 'Izzat Trablusī, secretary-general of the administrative council of the Arab Club (See attachment 2 to letter RMVP (Knothe) to AA (von Hentig), 14 December 1937, reproduced in *Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik 1918–1945. Serie D: 1937–1945, vol. V*, Imprimerie Nationale, Baden-Baden, 1963, pp. 654–5). See also Juḥā, *Al-ḥaraka*, pp. 179–81.
- 94 See attachment 3 'Angebot' to letter RMVP to AA, 14 December 1937, reproduced in *Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik 1918–1945. Serie D: 1937–1945, vol. V*, Imprimerie Nationale, Baden-Baden, 1963, pp. 655–6, 'Abd al-Ghanī, *Almāniyā al-nāziyya*, p. 222, and L. Hirszowicz, *Third Reich*, p. 35.
- 95 'Abd al-Ghanī, *Almāniyā al-nāziyya*, p. 223.
- 96 Rayyis, *Al-kitāb – I*, p. 308. Rayyis explicitly claims that Germany was prepared to furnish weapons against Britain, though not against France. Rayyis provides additional information about the background of Imām's visit. In 1936, Rayyis writes, the ANP became increasingly convinced that weapons were needed for the formation of a secret organization of resistance against the French in Syria. With the support of Ḥusaynī, the organization hoped to acquire a substantial quantity of German weapons for the Palestinian revolt, which were then to be divided to serve both Palestinian and Syrian needs. While Ḥusaynī refused to provide Imām with a formal letter declaring him to be his representative, he agreed to support his visit and his request. Based on these arrangements, Imām finally left for Germany, while Rayyis himself was charged with the preparations to unload the weapons via the Mediterranean and to prepare their secret distribution and storage. According to Rayyis, the loading of the weapons in Germany was already in process when the deal ultimately stalled. See Rayyis, *Al-kitāb – I*, pp. 305–8.



- 97 Qawuqjī writes that the simultaneous delegation of two envoys had made them 'ridiculous' in the eyes of the Germans, Kh. Qāsimiyya, (ed.), *Mudhakkirāt Fawzī Qawuqjī*, Damascus: Dār al-Dabbās, 1990, p. 266. He added that Imām had given a talk in Berlin in which he expressed his appreciation of German support, much to the annoyance of the German side, which had preferred to keep this support secret. See also F. Grobba, *Die deutsche Ausnutzung der arabischen Eingeborenenbewegung im zweiten Weltkrieg*, Foreign Military Manuscripts FMS, P-207, National Archives, Washington (HP), p. 33. This document is analysed in detail in W. G. Schwanitz, "'The Jinnee and the Magic Bottle". Fritz Grobba and the German Middle Eastern Policy 1900–1945', in W. G. Schwanitz (ed.), *Germany and the Middle East 1871–1945*, Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2004, pp. 87–117.
- 98 'Abd al-Ghanī speaks of some hundred rifles; he assumes that this support was not coordinated with Hitler, 'Abd al-Ghanī, *Almāniyā al-nāziyya*, p. 225. See also Grobba, *Ausnutzung*, pp. 29–34.
- 99 Cf. AAPA CGB 68, German Embassy in Paris, Notes submitted to the AA, 1 March 1939.
- 100 AAPA CGB 68, CGB, Internal Note (J.N. 1349), 26 April 1937.
- 101 Arslān, *Mudhakkirāt*, p. 93.
- 102 For Shakīb Arslān's manoeuvring in the context of the Spanish Civil War, see J. Bessis, 'Chekib Arslan et le Fascisme', in *Les relations entre le Maghreb et le Mashrek. Des solidarités anciennes aux réalités nouvelles*, Cahier no. 6. Aix-en-Provence: Institut de recherches méditerranéennes, 1984, pp. 126–8. Sh. Arslān considered Mussolini 'a personal friend', cf. Ministère Public Fédéral, Service de Police (Geneva), Procès-verbal d'audition, 6 October 1938 (HP), p. 2.
- 103 Sh. Arslān, 'Les Musulmans du Riff ne doivent pas être de la chair à canon', *La Nation Arabe*, no. 14–15, 1937, p. 774.
- 104 G. Höpp, 'Salud wa Salam. Araber im spanischen Bürgerkrieg', *Inamo*, no. 33, 2003, p. 53.
- 105 The French position with regard to the Spanish Civil War was itself subject to change. These changes were reflected in the stance adopted by the pro-French newspaper *La Syrie*. In June 1937, the German consul in Beirut noted with satisfaction that *La Syrie* had 'justly treated our standpoint' in its coverage of the German attack against the Spanish town of Guernica (AAPA CGB 65, CGB to AA (J.N. 1069), 2 June 1937). Such viewpoint which contrasted with previous attacks by the newspaper against Germany, could be attributed to its vehement anti-Communist orientation. With the defeat of the Popular Front in Paris, such positions now came again to the open.
- 106 Sh. Arslān, 'L'Anschluss', *La Nation Arabe*, no. 16–17, 1938, pp. 832–3.
- 107 Nantes 673, 'report from Cairo', attached to the letter Délégué de HCF to the Délégué Général de HCF, 'Renseignement parvenue à cette délégation sur la propagande allemande en Orient', 26 August 1938, p. 1.
- 108 Arslān presented a talk dealing, amongst other things, with the situation in Spain. In an article that was published later, he wrote with regard to the evening: 'On ne peut tout dire en public, et lorsque ces jeunes étudiants auront l'expérience de la vie, ils verront qu'on sert quelquefois la cause nationale par le mutisme, comme on la sert par l'éloquence. Cela dépend des circonstances.' (Sh. Arslān, 'Une Soirée au Club Arabe de Berlin', *La Nation Arabe*, no. 18–19, 1938, p. 1007)
- 109 According to a report by the German consulate in Beirut, Şulḥ's call was the result of a deal between Bakdāsh and Şulḥ, the later hoping for Bakdāsh's support during the Paris negotiations, see AAPA CGB 68, CGB to AA (J.N. 1068), 'Der Kommunismus in Syrien-Libanon', 10 July 1937, p. 6.
- 110 Höpp, 'Salud wa Salam', p. 53, and Kh. Bakdāsh, *Al-'arab wa-l-ḥarb al-ahliyya fī isbāniyā*, Damascus: Maṭba'at al-Kashshāf, 1937, p. 6.

- 111 See e.g. AAPA CGB 65, CGB to AA (J.N. 366), 'Jüdisch-französische Pressehetze gegen Deutschland', 23 February 1938, AAPA CGB 65, CGB to AA (J.N. 1912), 'Hetze gegen Deutschland', 6 August 1938, and AAPA CGB 65, CGB to AA (J.N. 1435), 'Deutschfeindliche Pressehetze', 12 May 1939.
- 112 Edmond Rabbath related to the "'Alsace-Lorraine" de l'Orient', E. Rabbath, *Unité syrienne et devenir arabe*, Paris: Librairie Marcel Rivière, 1937, p. 10. See also Hirsowicz, *Third Reich*, p. 45.
- 113 Bakdāsh, *Al-'arab wa-l-ḥarb*.
- 114 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 26.
- 115 Sh al-Kaylānī, *Al-ḥizb al-shuyū'ī al-sūrī*, Damascus: al-Ahālī, 2003, p. 53.
- 116 T. Y. Ismael/J. S. Ismael, *The Communist Movement in Syria and Lebanon*, Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1998, p. 29.
- 117 The German consulate saw the rising impact of the CP with concern. It particularly noted its mounting influence in schools and universities (AAPA CGB 68, CGB to AA (J.N. 1068), 'Der Kommunismus in Syrien-Libanon', 10 July 1937, pp. 3 and 5).
- 118 Z. Mallā, *Ṣafḥāt min tārīkh al-ḥizb al-shuyū'ī al-sūrī 1924–1954*, Damascus: al-Ahālī, 1994, pp. 108–10.
- 119 For the development of the League and the importance of *al-Ṭalī'a*, cf. 'A. Hannā, *Al-ḥaraka al-munāhiḍa li-l-fāshiyya fī sūriyā wa lubnān 1933–45*, Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, pp. 73–5, and Ḥ. Murūwa, 'Al-udabā' wa-l-mufakkirūn al-lubnāniyūn fī-l-ṇiḍāl dīdd al-fāshistiyya wa min ajil al-ṣadāqa ma' al-ittiḥād al-sufiyāfī', *al-Ṭarīq*, no. 4, 1985, pp. 170–73. The exact date of its creation as an organized 'committee' is unclear. In the editorial of the first number of *al-Ṭarīq*, Qadrī Qalā'ajī states that the League was actually founded in 1935 (Q. Qalā'ajī, 'Risālat al-'uṣba', *al-Ṭarīq*, no. 1, 1941, p. 2).
- 120 'Dimā'shuḥadā'inā!', leaflet signed by Bakdāsh in the name of the Central Committee of the Syrian-Lebanese CP, 20 March 1939.
- 121 'Mukāfaḥat al-fāshistiyya!', *al-Ṭalī'a*, no. 5, 1939, p. 347. See also Mallā, *Ṣafḥāt*, pp. 116–19.
- 122 Senders of letters included Luṭfī al-Ḥaffār, former Syrian prime minister, Fā'iz al-Khūrī, former minister of the Syrian government, and Shukrī al-Quwwatī, deputy and former minister. See 'Congresso antifascista a Beirut', *Oriente Moderno*, no. 6, 1938, pp. 320–21. This support was not unanimous. In its regular bulletin, the Arab National Office for Research and Information published a critical article about the conference, questioning the need to address fascism instead of 'se consacrer préalablement aux sujets d'actualité locale qui ne font pourtant pas défaut' (CZA S 25/4558, Bureau National Arabe de Recherche et d'Informations, Bulletin Hebdomadaire N° 25, Damascus, 4 May 1939, p. 8).
- 123 These speeches are reprinted in *al-Ṭalī'a*, no. 5, 1939. The files of the German consulate in Beirut include a six-page handwritten account of the conference, written in French but unsigned and undated (AAPA CGB 68, minutes from the conference of the League against Nazism and Fascism, May 1939).
- 124 R. Khūrī, 'Taqrīr al-lajna al-taḥḍīriyya fī mu'tamar mukāfaḥat al-fāshistiyya', *al-Ṭalī'a*, no. 5, 1939, pp. 349–50.
- 125 I. Kaylānī, 'Naḥḍatunā al-ḥadītha. al-shabāb al-sūrī', *Majallat al-Mu'allimīn wa-l-Mu'allimāt*, no. 1, 1935, p. 29.
- 126 See e.g. 'Al-jīl al-muḡbil fī al-māniyā', *al-Ḥadīth*, no. 1, 1936, pp. 41–3, 'Kayfa naẓẓama al-mustashār hitlir al-shabāb al-almānī?', *al-Muṣawwar*, 1 July 1936, p. 12, and 'Ḥarakat al-shabāb al-almānī', *al-Amālī*, 10 February 1939, pp. 8–12.
- 127 Sh. al-Kaylānī, 'Risālat al-shabāb', *al-Tamaddun al-Islāmī*, no. 5, 1938, p. 137.
- 128 M. al-Nuṣūlī, *Fī sabīl al-istiqlāl. naẓarāt fī-l-tarbiya al-ḥadītha*, Beirut: Maṭba'at al-Ṣabāḥ al-Waṭaniyya, 1937, Arabic page ref 'waw'.
- 129 Nuṣūlī, *Fī sabīl al-istiqlāl*, pp. 66–7.

- 130 See also S. ['Abd] Sālim, 'Al-mashākil al-ijtimā'īyya. al-ta'lim al-ibtida'ī', *al-'Urwa al-Wuthqā*, June 1937, pp. 37–45.
- 131 Nuṣūlī, *Fī sabīl al-istiqlāl*, p. 17.
- 132 Q. Zurayq, 'Al-tarbiyya al-qawmiyya', *al-Ḥadīth*, no. 1, 1937, p. 16.
- 133 Cf. e.g. 'Istifā' al-ḥadīth', *al-Ḥadīth*, no. 1, 1938, pp. 16–26 and 110–15. *al-Ḥadīth* had asked several Arab intellectuals about the requirements for a revival of ancient Arab culture.
- 134 The impact of biological and anthropological research for debates on culture, nationalism, and identity echoes in an article on blood groups. Increasing knowledge about the distribution of blood groups among different peoples, the authors argues, could be used in crime prevention (M. Khayr al-Shuwayrī, 'Al-dam wa anwā'uhu fī-l-bashr', *al-Amālī*, 29 December 1938, pp. 20–22). Debates about genetics left its mark in a similar way in public discourses. The idea of an improvement of the physical constitution by methods of birth control, eugenics, and the manipulation of human reproduction inspired debates about national identity as well. See e.g. Š. Sharāb, 'Al-wirātha wa taḥsīn al-nasl 'ind al-insān', *al-'Urwa al-Wuthqā*, April 1937, pp. 46–52.
- 135 Cf. the widely noted book *A month in Europe [Shahr fī urubbā]*, written by Sāmī Kayyālī, the editor of *al-Ḥadīth*. See also the writings of Yūrj [Georges] Ḥaddād about German historians Ranke and Treitschke as harbingers of the German nation, Y. Ḥaddād, 'Al-tārīkh wa-l-waṭaniyya', *al-Ḥadīth*, no. 5, 1937, pp. 374–8, and Y. Ḥaddād, 'Al-mu'arikhūn al-almān wa takwīn al-waḥda al-almāniyya', *al-Ḥadīth*, no. 1, 1938, pp. 88, 101–4.
- 136 Cf. S. 'Abd Sālim, 'Hakadhā takallama Zarādasht', *al-'Urwa al-Wuthqā*, May 1936, pp. 3–6, F. Shā'ib, 'Al-jīl al-bannā', *al-Ḥadīth*, no. 9, 1939, pp. 719–24, and N. Ward, 'Insān Nīsha', *al-Ṭalī'a*, no. 1, 1936, pp. 84–6.
- 137 F. Fāris, *Hakadhā takallama Zarādasht*, Beirut: Dār al-Qalam, 1970.
- 138 M. al-Ḥusāmī, 'Falsafat Nīsha wa-l-sūbarmān', *al-Amālī*, 28 October 1938, p. 10.
- 139 See 'U. Farrūkh, 'Hakadhā takallama Zarādasht', *al-Amālī*, 3. February 1939, pp. 29–30.
- 140 Fāris claims that Nietzsche's 'lion of the desert' is actually a reference to Muḥammad (F. Fāris, 'Al-nabī Muḥammad asad al-ṣaḥrā', *al-Amālī*, 4 August 1939, pp. 2–3). This article is based on a talk given by Fāris in July 1939 on the Italian Arab-language Radio Bari.
- 141 'U. Farrūkh, 'Ḥarakat al-imān al-almānī', *al-Amālī*, 7 October 1938, pp. 24–6.
- 142 Ibid., p. 25.
- 143 'U. Farrūkh, 'Al-imān al-almānī wa-l-adyān al-tārīkhiyya', *al-Amālī*, 21 October 1938, p. 20. Farrūkh showed much interest in the idea of a German–Jewish antagonism. Anti-Semitism, Farrūkh explained, is not meant to include Arabs, but reflected the idea of a 'Jewishness' as an all-encompassing negation of the German people ('U. Farrūkh, 'Ḥarakat al-imān al-almānī', *al-Amālī*, 7 October 1938, p. 26). In September 1939, *al-Amālī* reproduced an article from the virulently anti-Semitic German newspaper *Der Stürmer* tracing the assumed influences of Jews in medical professions, 'Al-yahūd fī tārīkh al-ṣaydala', *al-Amālī*, 1 September 1939, p. 27.
- 144 Sāṭī' al-Ḥuṣrī (1882–1968) should be mentioned in this context. Ḥuṣrī, who was born in Yemen into a family of Aleppine origin, was forced into exile in Iraq in the early 1920s; in Baghdad, he co-founded the Baghdad University and took up leading positions in the Ministry of Education. It was only in 1941 that Ḥuṣrī returned to Beirut and later to Damascus, where he was formally charged with the development of a curriculum that would reflect Arab nationalist aspirations. In 1946, he returned to Baghdad. Ḥuṣrī was a prominent intellectual who contributed some of the major works dedicated to pan-Arab nationalist thought. Yet, Ḥuṣrī's influence in Syria and Lebanon only developed during the 1940s. In a study of Ḥuṣrī's thought, Bassam Tibi highlights the influence of German romantic nationalism (B. Tibi, *Vom Gottesreich*

- zum Nationalstaat. *Islam und panarabischer Nationalismus*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1987, pp. 113–26). See also W. L. Cleveland, *The Making of an Arab Nationalist. Ottomanism and Arabism in the life and thought of Sati' al-Husri*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971. For Ḥuṣrī's work as an official of the Syrian ministry of education, see U. Freitag, *Geschichtsschreibung in Syrien 1920–1990, Zwischen Wissenschaft und Ideologie*. Hamburg: Deutsches Orient Institut, 1991, pp. 46–51.
- 145 M. al-Manjūrī, 'Madhāhib al-musāwāt fī-l-'asr al-ḥādīr', *al-Ḥadīth*, no. 1, 1936, p. 26.
  - 146 A. Sa'āda, *Nushū' al-umam*, Damascus: Dār al-Ṭlās, 1997, pp. 7–8.
  - 147 The term was coined by Gabriel de Mortillet, who differentiated between 'historical races' and 'bio-physical races'. Sa'āda refers to Mortillet as a proof for the faultiness of the assumption of a single racial descent of nations; he does not further elaborate on the term or on its relevance for his own views (Sa'āda, *Nushū' al-umam*, p. 243). Sa'āda's views are controversially discussed in today's historiography of nationalist thought in the Arab world. B. Tibi claims that Sa'āda had in fact adopted a 'pseudoscientific, biological definition of the nation that was prevalent during the Third Reich.' (Tibi, *Gottesreich*, p. 183) Ḥ. Ṣāghīyya also identifies a strong influence of Nazi racial theories (Ṣāghīyya, *Qawmiyyūn*, p. 220). C. Schumann, in contrast, insists that Sa'āda's objection to the concept of racial purity marks a significant difference to National Socialist racial thought, C. Schumann, 'Symbolische Aneignungen. Antun Sa'ādas Radikálnationalismus in der Epoche des Faschismus', in G. Höpp, P. Wien, and R. Wildangel (eds), *Blind für die Geschichte? Arabische Begegnungen mit dem Nationalsozialismus*, Berlin: Hans Schiler Verlag, 2004, pp. 161–5. See also Mendel and Müller, who describe Sa'āda's ideology as a form of 'cultural or civilization racism' (Mendel and Müller, 'Fascist Tendencies', p. 9).
  - 148 A. Sa'āda, 'Ma'nā al-umma wa ṣifātuha', *al-Majalla*, May/June 1933 (reproduced in: A. Sa'āda, *Al-a'māl al-kāmila. al-juz' al-thani 1932–1936*, Beirut: Dār Sa'āda, 2000, p. 57). To define the term 'sulāla', Sa'āda used the English term 'race'.
  - 149 Sa'āda, *Nushū' al-umam*, p. 259.
  - 150 L. Z. Yamak, *The Syrian Social Nationalist Party. An ideological analysis*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966, p. 84. Cf. the declaration made by Sa'āda at a later point: 'The Syrian nation is the unity of the Syrian people that is born out of a long history preceding plain [*jālī*] historical time.' (Quoted in Ṣāghīyya, *Qawmiyyūn*, p. 204).
  - 151 While Sa'āda did not elaborate in detail on questions of religion in *Nushū' al-umam*, his 1942 published work 'Islam in its two messages: Christianity and Muhammadanism' is more explicit. Here, Sa'āda tries to 'Syrianize' both religions as being part of an essentially non-religious, nationalist mission. Syrian nationalism thus appears as a 'secularized religion', see Ṣāghīyya, *Qawmiyyūn*, pp. 235–44.
  - 152 Interpretations of Sa'āda's image of the Jews are often wide apart. While Schumann considers Sa'āda's vehement attacks on Zionism and Jews as an expression of Sa'āda's anti-sectarian approach to the nation, Ṣāghīyya highlights the perceived existential and supra-historical confrontation between the Syrian nation and the Jews. See Schumann, 'Antūn Sa'āda', pp. 170–73, and Ṣāghīyya, *Qawmiyyūn*, pp. 244–9.
  - 153 For an insight into these two party newspapers, see J. N. Al-'Aql, *Al-iltizām fī jarīdatay 'al-nahḍa' wa 'sūriyā al-jadīda'*, Beirut: al-Fūrāt, 2002.
  - 154 A. Sa'āda, 'Sūriyā al-Jadīda', *Sūriyā al-Jadīda*, 11 March 1939.
  - 155 See e.g. the two unsigned articles 'Ḥayāt hirtzil al-sirriyya', *Sūriyā al-Jadīda*, 29 April 1939, and 'Al-dhabab wa-l-yahūdiyya al-intirnasīyūniyya', *Sūriyā al-Jadīda*, 12 August 1939. See also A. Sa'āda, 'Al-ḥayāt al-qawmiyya', *Sūriyā al-Jadīda*, 17 June 1939.
  - 156 'Hal taqā'u al-'ajība wa yattafiqu al-diddān Hitlr wa Stālīn?', *Sūriyā al-Jadīda*, 13 May 1939. This article was reprinted on 26 August 1939 in the light of the Molotov–

- Ribbentrop Pact. In another context, Sa'āda addresses a supposed 'Jewish–Communist principle' and its consequences for the nation, see A. Sa'āda, 'Al-ḥayāt al-qawmiyya', *Sūriyā al-Jadīda*, 17 June 1939.
- 157 See for Rabbath also Freitag, *Geschichtsschreibung*, pp. 108–12.
- 158 Rabbath, *Unité syrienne*, p. 33.
- 159 Ibid.
- 160 Ulrike Freitag points to similarities between Rabbath's and Gustave Le Bon's concepts of race (Freitag, *Geschichtsschreibung*, p. 111).
- 161 See Juḥā, *Al-ḥaraka*, pp. 85–95.
- 162 Q. Zurayq, 'Al-wa'ī al-qawmī', *al-Ḥadīth*, no. 8, 1939, p. 669.
- 163 Although Zurayq shared the basic tenets of pan-Arab nationalism, he insisted on the necessity of modernizing society and evaluating Western technology and political institutions in an attempt to profit from Western experience. Zurayq's concept of nationalism was not entirely reduced to the interests of the collective: he considered nationalism as a means rather than a goal. For him, the individual and the interest of the individual remained a major determinant of politics and thought, see H. Faris, 'Constantine K. Zurayk. Advocate of rationalism in modern Arab thought', in G. N. Atiyeh/I. M. Oweiss, *Arab Civilisation. Challenges and responses*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1988, pp. 20–21.
- 164 Freitag, *Geschichtsschreibung*, p. 113.
- 165 Zurayq, 'Al-wa'ī al-qawmī', *al-Ḥadīth*, no. 8 (August 1939), p. 651.
- 166 Ibid., p. 651.
- 167 Ş. Tarzī, 'Al-fāshiyya', *al-Ḥadīth*, no. 7, 1937 p. 519.
- 168 Ş. Tarzī, 'Al-waṭaniyya al-ishtirākīyya', *al-Ḥadīth*, no. 9, 1938, p. 627.
- 169 'U. Farrūkh, 'Mawt diktātūr', *al-Amālī*, 25 November 1938, p. 2.
- 170 This term is borrowed from Schumann, 'Anṭūn Sa'āda', p. 175.
- 171 Cf. e.g. A. Sa'āda, 'Hurriya, dīmūqrāṭīyya, musāwāt fi-l-nizām al-niyyābī', *Sūriyā al-Jadīda*, 19 August 1939, and A. Sa'āda, 'Alā ḥisāb sūriyya fa li-taḥīyya 'al-dīmūqrāṭīyya', *Sūriyā al-Jadīda*, 20 May 1939.
- 172 In summer 1939, *al-Talī'a* dedicated an issue of the magazine to the history of the French Revolution: *al-Talī'a*, no. 7, 1939.
- 173 See also G. Nordbruch, 'Defending the French Revolution during the Second World War. Raif Khoury and the intellectual challenge of Nazism in the Levant', *Mediterranean Historical Review*, no. 2, 2006, pp. 219–38.
- 174 R. Khūrī, *Ḥuqūq al-insān. min ayna wa ilā ayna al-maṣīr?* Damascus: Maṭba'at Ibn Zaydūn, 1937, p. 34.
- 175 Ibid., p. 77.

#### 4 Repercussions of the Second World War: facing the Axis in the Levant (1939–1941)

- 1 M. N. Şidqī, *Al-taqālīd al-islāmīyya wa-l-mabādī al-nāziyya – hāl tattafiqān?* Beirut: no publisher, 1940. Şidqī was of Palestinian origin, but had spent much of the late 1930s in Syria and Lebanon, where this study was published. Şidqī had actively been engaged in communist circles.
- 2 Şidqī, *Al-taqālīd*, p. 85. Şidqī's analysis was heavily based on references to Islamic traditions and offered various arguments for a critique of National Socialist thought from an Islamic perspective. It is not unlikely that the publication itself was supported, if not initiated, by French or, even more probable, British sources. Şidqī's defence of British and French policies in the colonial empires and his explicit critique of the Egyptian Wafd's stance towards Britain are striking. Soon after the publication of the book, it was praised in the Arab language programme of British *Radio Daventry*, further adding to this suspicion. See CAOM 915 d. 4, Ministère des Colonies, *Revue de la presse et des questions musulmanes*, 1 June 1940, p. 175.

- 3 Sh. Juḥā, *Al-ḥaraka al-ʿarabiyya al-sirriyya. Jamāʿat al-kitāb al-aḥmar. 1935–1945*, Beirut: al-Furāt, 2004, p. 195.
- 4 Nantes 2, Rapport ‘Activités de l’axe dans le Proche-Orient. Organisation d’une cinquième colonne en Syrie et au Liban’, August 1941, p. 3.
- 5 A. Hourani, *Syria and Lebanon. A political essay*, London: Oxford, 1946, p. 233: ‘[F] or the majority of politically conscious Syrians, the collapse of France and her subsequent difficulties served not so much to throw them into the arms of her former ally or her former enemy, as to make them more than ever eager to rid themselves of French and all foreign domination.’
- 6 It is interesting to note that this period is often dealt with only in passing. Exceptions to this are publications focusing on the military aspect of the British–Free France offensive. See e.g. M.-C. Davet, *La double affaire de Syrie*, Paris: Fayard, 1967, and N. E. Bou-Nacklie, ‘The 1941 Invasion of Syria and Lebanon: The role of the local paramilitary’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, no. 3, 1994. See also H. de Wailly, *Syrie 1941. La guerre occultée. Vichystes contre Gaullistes*, Paris: Perrin, 2007.
- 7 CAOM 1425 d. 9, Ministère de la Défense, Bulletin de renseignements des questions musulmanes, 16 May 1939, p. 225.
- 8 Cf. CG Damascus, MacKereth to FO, 9 July 1939, reproduced in M. G. Fry and I. Rabinovich, *Despatches from Damascus. Gilbert MacKereth and British Policy in the Levant 1933–39*, Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1985, pp. 218–19, and P. S. Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate. The politics of Arab nationalism 1920–1945*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987, pp. 579–80.
- 9 Khoury, *Syria*, pp. 584–5, Hourani, *Syria and Lebanon*, p. 230, and Juḥā, *Al-ḥaraka*, p. 197. For wartime regulations concerning the press, see Nantes 2417, HC, ‘La Presse au Liban et en Syrie’, Décembre 1940, p. 2. Regarding the arrest of Axis sympathizers and German nationals see C. Metzger, *L’Empire colonial français dans la stratégie du Troisième Reich (1936–1945)*, vol. I, Brussels: P.I.E.-Peter Lang, 2002, pp. 214–16.
- 10 CAOM 1425 d. 9, Ministère de la Défense, Bulletin de renseignements des questions musulmanes, 18 October 1939, p. 447.
- 11 ‘A. Shaʿīb, *Al-tadakhkhul al-ajnaḇī w-azmāt al-hukm fī tārikh al-ʿarab al-ḥadīth wa-l-muʿāṣir*, Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 2005, p. 251.
- 12 AA, Pol VII, Note ‘Zur Frage eines Funks in arabischer Sprache durch deutsche Sender’, 8 January 1938 (HP).
- 13 Shaʿīb, *Al-tadakhkhul*, pp. 223–5.
- 14 Nantes 446, Note ‘Thèmes de Propagande N° 3’, p. 4. This undated note was most probably written in late 1939/early 1940.
- 15 Metzger, *Empire colonial*, pp. 191–3.
- 16 See Metzger, *Empire colonial*, p. 221.
- 17 CAOM 1425 d. 9, Ministère de la Défense, Bulletin de renseignements des questions musulmanes, 16 June 1939, p. 240.
- 18 CAOM 1425 d. 9, Ministère de la Défense, Bulletin de renseignements des questions musulmanes, 18 October 1939, p. 448, and Ministère de la Défense, Bulletin de renseignements des questions musulmanes, 18 November 1939, p. 486. See also BCG Damascus, MacKereth to FO, 26 September 1939, reproduced in Fry and Rabinovich, *Despatches*, pp. 219–20. Gilbert MacKereth, the British consul in Damascus, stressed the popularity of German broadcasts. His claim that Anṭūn Saʿāda had recently been appointed to the Arab staff of the station was incorrect (Fry and Rabinovich, *Despatches*, p. 220).
- 19 By mid-October, MacKereth noted that German broadcasts ‘still maintain their ascendancy over the majority of Arab listeners, although the measures taken by the French ... have reduced the extent of their diffusion’ (BCG Damascus, MacKereth to FO, 17 October 1939, reproduced in Fry and Rabinovich, *Despatches*, p. 225).
- 20 CAOM 915 d. 4, Ministère des Colonies, Revue de la presse et des questions musulmanes, 20 December 1939, pp. 220–22.

- 21 CAOM 915 d. 4, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères à Ministre des Colonies, 'A/S propagande allemande en terre d'Islam', 14 March 1940. The authorities tried to prevent the entry of many of these newspapers, which were published in Argentine and Brazil, into the French mandates.
- 22 Nantes 912, Service de la Presse et de la Propagande, 'Compte rendu de l'activité du Service de la Propagande (mois de Novembre 1939)', 1 December 1939, p. 1.
- 23 Ibid., pp. 1–2.
- 24 CAOM 1425 d. 9, Ministère de la Défense, Bulletin de renseignements des questions musulmanes, 18 November 1939, p. 487. Other sources claim that Arslān was named 'honorary citizen of the Reich'. Arslān denied that he had received any such honour, see W. Cleveland, *Islam against the West. Shakib Arslan and the campaign for Islamic nationalism*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985, p. 156.
- 25 See *al-Ayyām* and *Lisān al-Hāl*, quoted in CAOM 909, Ministère des Colonies, 'Revue de la presse et des questions musulmanes', N° 13/1939, pp. 195–7.
- 26 S. al-Asīr, 'Al-dimūqrāṭiyya wa-l-'arab', *al-Hadīth*, no. 9, 1939, p. 748.
- 27 'Al-ḥarb, al-'arab wa-l-islām', *al-'Irfān*, no. 9, 1939, pp. 1–2.
- 28 CAOM 909, Ministère des Colonies, 'Revue de la presse et des questions musulmanes', no. 13/1939, p. 196.
- 29 Nantes 594, Transcript of sermon delivered by Mubārak at St. Georges in Beirut, 15 March 1940, p. 2.
- 30 CAOM 1425 d. 9, Ministère de la Défense, Bulletin de renseignements des questions musulmanes, 23 December 1939, p. 530.
- 31 CAOM 1425 d. 9, Ministère de la Défense, Bulletin de renseignements des questions musulmanes, 18 October 1939, p. 469.
- 32 'U. Ḥaddād, *Ḥarakat Rashīd 'Ālī Kīlānī 1941*, Saïda: al-Maṭba'a al-'Aṣriyya, no date, p. 5.
- 33 In a report of the German Consulate General, it is noted that Tuwaynī had informally drawn the attention of the consulate to a recently created 'Jewish propaganda centre in Beirut'. The report included a remark made by Tuwaynī that he himself was 'no Nazi', AAPA 65, Note (J.N. 2064) 'Jüdische Propaganda im Libanon', 30 August 1938.
- 34 As well as Tuwaynī, the consulate also suggested Charles Amoun (*Le Jour*), Rudolph Kecati (*La Chronique*), Sadāwī (*Alif Bā'*), and Najīb al-Rayyis (*al-Qabas*) (AAPA CGB 65, CGB (Seiler) to DNB Ankara (Schmidt-Dumont), 23 March 1937).
- 35 Nantes 2, France Libre au Levant, 'A/S L'activité allemande au Levant', 27 August 1941, pp. 2–3, and Nantes 74, dossier Notables Libanais, France Libre au Levant, Note sur les 'Leaders Grecs Orthodoxes', undated (probably summer 1941).
- 36 Juḥā, *Al-ḥaraka*, p. 192.
- 37 Nantes 2396, Délégation Générale de la France Libre au Levant, 'Le Parti Populaire Syrien (PPS) (note d'information)', April 1942, p. 2.
- 38 Ibid., pp. 8–9.
- 39 N. Ḥardān, *Sa'āda fī-l-mahjar. al-juz' al-thānī 1938–40*, Beirut: Bīsān, 1996, pp. 63–9.
- 40 Sa'āda reportedly ordered the Berlin cell to create a quarterly magazine that would spread information about the party and popularize its views. In the aftermath of his visit, which ended in late October 1938, the magazine was apparently released under the name *al-Rasā'il* (ibid. p. 65).
- 41 Ibid., p. 69.
- 42 Ibid., p. 161.
- 43 See for such articles 'Al-kitāb al-abyaḍ al-almānī', *Sūriyā al-Jadīda*, 20 April 1940, and 'Tanāzu' al-baqā' fī mayādīn al-ḥayāt', *Sūriyā al-Jadīda*, 8 [6] June 1940. See also Nantes 2396, Délégation Générale de la France Libre au Levant, 'Le Parti Populaire Syrien (PPS) (Note d'Information)', April 1942, p. 7.
- 44 Letter by Sa'āda to the administrative board of *Sūriyā al-Jadīda*, 10 November 1939, reproduced in Ḥardān, *Sa'āda*, p. 267.

- 45 Ibid., pp. 263–5.
- 46 Nantes 2395, SG (Beirut), ‘A/S Activité pro-Allemande’ (N° 6416), 30 August 1939.
- 47 See e.g. Nantes 2395, Commissaire Central Tripoli (Naffah), Information, 25 June 1940, and Nantes 2395, HCB, Cabinet Politique, ‘Note sur l’activité du Parti Populaire Syrien et de la Ligue d’Action Nationale’, 14 September 1939.
- 48 Cleveland, *Islam*, pp. 154–5.
- 49 Cleveland, *Islam*, p. 156.
- 50 For a detailed assessment of these conventions, see Metzger, *Empire colonial*, pp. 246–8.
- 51 Ibid., pp. 249–52.
- 52 Ibid., p. 264–7, and M. Albord, *L’Armée française et les états du Levant 1936–1946*, Paris: CNRS Editions, 2000, pp. 98–100. A summary of the activities of the German sub-commission to the IAC is provided in n.n. [Free France], *Les Allemands en Syrie sous le gouvernement de Vichy*, London: Keliher, Hudson & Kearns, 1942. See for an additional account: I. al-Riyāshī, *Qabl wa ba’d. 1918–41. juz 1*, Beirut: no publisher, 1953, pp. 266–78. For an insight into the local German community during the years of the Second World War, cf. D. Kumetat, ‘Die Nahostpolitik der Achsenmächte und das Schicksal deutschsprachiger Bürger im Libanon zur Zeit des 2. Weltkrieges’, *Angelpunkte*, no. 2, 2005.
- 53 AAPA R 29764, Woermann an RAM, Berlin, Anhang ‘Lage in Syrien’ (August 1940), 2 September 1940. See also Albord, *L’Armée française*, p. 117: ‘Pour les peuples du Levant, les Français sont des vaincus.’ Similar A. Hūrānī, *Mudhakkirāt Akram Hūrānī – vol. I*, Cairo: Maktabat Madbūlī, 2000, p. 218.
- 54 See Haddād, *Mudhakkirāt*, p. 22.
- 55 Nantes 2, Rapport au Directeur de la SG (Beirut), 23 October 1941.
- 56 Ibid., p. 4.
- 57 Nantes 2, France Libre au Levant, SGA, ‘B. propagande allemande parmi les nationaux’, undated (probably August 1941), pp. 1–2.
- 58 Nantes 2, Rapport au Directeur de la SGA (Beirut), 23 October 1941, pp. 5–6. According to this report, Ṣulḥ had received 700 Gold Pounds via the IAC for his support. In summer 1940, Quwwatī had approached various nationalist leaders in Syria and Lebanon to form a political bloc which would serve as a basis for a potential revolt against the French. The ANP leadership in Baghdad debated this initiative in July–August 1940, see Juḥā, *Al-ḥaraka*, p. 262.
- 59 Khoury, *Syria*, pp. 590–91.
- 60 Cf. Nantes 673, Légation de France en Iraq à MAE, ‘A/S Activité allemande en Irak’, 15 April 1939, and Nantes 673, Ambassadeur de France en Roumanie à Président du Conseil et MAE, ‘A/S activité allemande dans le Proche-Orient’, 25 March 1940.
- 61 French authorities were aware that German agents – at least since summer 1939 – had been furnished with fabricated German passports that were stamped with a red ‘J’ for ‘Jude’ (Nantes 673, HCB, Cabinet Politique au Cabinet Militaire, Renseignement, 6 July 1939). Despite this knowledge, informants of the French Sûreté Générale continued to hand in reports about ‘German Jews’ being engaged in pro-German propaganda; cf. a report about a meeting between two supposed German Jews with the head of the local branch of the SNP in Beirut in November 1940 (Nantes 2395, Délégué-Adjoint du HC, Conseiller Administratif du Mont Liban to HC, 22 November 1940). Munīr al-Rayyis recounts a related story that confirms such a piece of information. In May 1941, Sa’īd Fattāḥ al-Imām had been asked by German officials to contact a German Jew living in Ba’quba, Iraq, to provide him with a secret code that was to be used in contacts with the German side. The person, Rayyis writes, later turned out to be a German agent who had settled in Iraq under the cover of an emigrant German Jew (M. al-Rayyis, *Al-kitāb al-dhahabī li-l-thawrāt al-waṭaniyya fī-l-mashriq al-‘arabī. ḥarb al-‘irāq ‘ām 1941*, Damascus: Maṭābi‘ Alif Bā’, 1977, p. 58).



- 62 A detailed summary of Roser's activities is given in a report by the French Sûreté Générale. According to this source, Roser arrived in Beirut in July; see Nantes 2, France Libre au Levant, SGA, 'C. Activité du S.R. allemand et travaux des commissions militaires', undated (probably August 1941), pp. 1–2. According to Sha'ib, Roser only joined the IAC by 30 September 1940 (Sha'ib, *Al-tadakhkhul*, p. 260).
- 63 Paula Koch is often mentioned as a major German agent in the pre-war years. See Sha'ib, *Al-tadakhkhul*, p. 260, and also Nantes 2, France Libre au Levant, SGA, 'C. Activité du S.R. allemand et travaux des commissions militaires', undated (probably August 1941), p. 1.
- 64 Among these interlocutors were the journalists 'Afif Ṭībī (*al-Yawm*), Ibrahim Kronfol, Elias Harfouche (*al-Ḥadīth*), Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Nuṣūlī, Fu'ād Qāsim (*Bayrūt*), and Rudolph Kecati (*Le Matin*). The amounts that were paid to these editors and journalists ranged from 50 to 150 Lebanese Pounds per month (Nantes 2, 'Rapport activités de l'Axe au Proche-Orient. Organisation d'une cinquième colonne en Syrie et au Liban', August 1941, p. 2, and Nantes 2411, France Libre au Levant, SGA, 'A/S L'activité allemande au Levant', 27 August 1941, pp. 1–2).
- 65 Nantes 2411, France Libre au Levant, SGA, 'A/S L'activité allemande au Levant', 27 August 1941, pp. 3–4.
- 66 *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- 67 N. Jazmāfī, *Al-ḥizb al-shuyū'ī al-sūrī 1924–1958*, Damascus: Maṭba'at Ibn Ḥayān, 1990, p. 132.
- 68 *Niḍāl al-Sha'b*, March 1941, p. 4.
- 69 See Nantes 2414, Général d'Armée (Cairo), Report 'Etat du problème syrien', 31 March 1941, p. 1.
- 70 Hourani, *Syria and Lebanon*, p. 236.
- 71 J. Valette, 'Nationalistes irakiens et guerre de Syrie (1940–1941)', *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, no. 153, 1989, pp. 65–6.
- 72 'Aufzeichnung des Gesandten Grobba', 27 August 1940, reproduced in *Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik 1918–1945*, Serie D: 1937–1945, vol. X, Frankfurt: P. Keppler Verlag, 1963, p. 459. See also F. Grobba, *Männer und Mächte im Orient. 25 Jahre diplomatischer Tätigkeit im Orient*, Göttingen: Musterschmidt, 1967, pp. 195–8, Nantes 2, Rapport 'Activités de l'axe dans le Proche-Orient. Organisation d'une cinquième colonne en Syrie et au Liban', August 1941, pp. 4–5.
- 73 Over the last years, Ḥusaynī had personally received financial support from Italian sources, see Metzger, *Empire colonial*, p. 330.
- 74 The Iraqi government promised to cut relations in case of German–British hostilities, leading to a public declaration in this sense by Sa'īd in early September 1939, Juḥā, *Al-ḥaraka*, p. 272. With regard to Ḥusaynī's influence in Iraq, see also 'A. 'Abd al-Ghanī, *Almāniyā al-nāziyya wa filasṭīn, 1933–1945*, Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1995, pp. 252–3.
- 75 AAPA R61123, Woermann to AA Politische Abteilung, 'Aufzeichnung zur arabischen Frage', Anlage 5, 7 March 1941, p. 2. See also Juḥā, *Al-ḥaraka*, p. 274.
- 76 Nantes 673, HCB to Ministre de France en Iran, Information, 23 April 1940. Among these activists was the exiled leader of the League of National Action. The note reports the existence of larger stocks of arms, and a German office in Iranian-Kurdistan that was said to be responsible for the coordination of pro-German activities in the region.
- 77 Juḥā, *Al-ḥaraka*, pp. 250–53.
- 78 *Ibid.*, p. 253.
- 79 In the light of a strong objection to any alliance with Britain, the Palestinian members of the party favoured either a neutral or an outright pro-Axis stand. The position of Iraqi nationalists was more complex. The declaration of war by Italy on 10 June 1940 had produced strong British pressure on the Iraqi government to cut its ties with the Italian regime and to submit to various measures meant to enforce British military

- positions in Iraq. While part of the Iraqi government opted for taking sides with Britain, the head of the government and related circles vehemently argued in favour of maintaining neutrality in the conflict with the Axis (Juhā, *Al-ḥaraka*, pp. 275–81).
- 80 Juhā, *Al-ḥaraka*, pp. 258–60.
- 81 See M. al-Durra, *Al-ḥarb al-ʿirāqīyya al-brīṭāniyya*, Beirut, 1969, pp. 143–4 (quoted in Juhā, *Al-ḥaraka*, p. 286).
- 82 Metzger, *Empire colonial*, p. 328, and Juhā, *Al-ḥaraka*, p. 286.
- 83 Ḥaddād gives a detailed account of these negotiations, Ḥaddād, *Mudhakkirāt*, pp. 24–55. See also AAPA R 61123, ‘Anlagen zur Aufzeichnung zur arabischen Frage’ (Woermann), 27 March 1941, Appendix 7 and 8, and Juhā, *Al-ḥaraka*, p. 291.
- 84 In contrast, the official German agency Transocean noted strong support for the German declaration in the Syrian public, AAPA R29764, Transocean Berlin, I-Dienst, 6 December 1940.
- 85 See a copy of a letter written by Arslān in Geneva addressed to Ḥaddād: Ḥaddād, *Mudhakkirāt*, pp. 77–78.
- 86 Memorandum of the party, 1 November 1940, quoted from the papers of Kāzīm al-Ṣulḥ in Juhā, *Al-ḥaraka*, p. 293.
- 87 For an overview of Syrian and Lebanese positions towards Italy in November–December 1940, and Italian complaints about these attitudes, see Nantes 912, HCB to Général Commandant Supérieur (Commission d’Armistice), ‘Note au sujet de l’attitude de la presse à l’égard de l’Italie’, 28 December 1940.
- 88 ‘Aufzeichnung des Legationsrates Melchers’, 9 December 1940, in *Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik 1918–1945, Serie D: 1937–1945, vol. XI.2*, Bonn: Gebr. Hermes, 1964, p. 691.
- 89 See Metzger, *Empire colonial*, p. 338.
- 90 AAPA R29764, Weizsäcker to German Embassy in Ankara (Hentig), 8 January 1941.
- 91 Nantes 93, Dossier 68, ‘Le Parti Populaire Arabe et les relations de ses chefs avec le nazisme’, undated and unsigned (probably late 1941).
- 92 See Nantes 2, Rapport ‘Activités de l’axe dans le Proche-Orient. Organisation d’une cinquième colonne en Syrie et au Liban’, August 1941, pp. 6–7, and the minutes of the interrogation of Sharīf al-Murādī, a member of the group who had earlier, in the late 1930s and early 1940s, spent three years in Germany (Nantes 2, PV d’affaire Cherif Bey al-Mouradi, 12 November 1941, p. 2).
- 93 Rayyis, *Al-kitāb – II*, pp. 29–30.
- 94 Nantes 2, Report ‘Comité National’, undated [1944?].
- 95 Nantes 74, Etude ‘Les Musulmans du Liban’, 25 February 1941.
- 96 Nantes 2, France Libre au Levant, SGA, ‘B. propagande allemande parmi les nationaux’, undated (probably August 1941), pp. 5–6. See also Shaʿīb, *Al-tadakhkhul*, pp. 262–3, and Davet, *Double Affaire*, pp. 57–8.
- 97 Nantes 2, France Libre au Levant, SGA, ‘B. propagande allemande parmi les nationaux’, undated (probably August 1941), p. 6.
- 98 Ibid., p. 8.
- 99 Rayyis, *Al-kitāb – II*, pp. 30–31.
- 100 Shaʿīb, *Al-tadakhkhul*, p. 263. M.-C. Davet draws attention to a similar Arab rhyme broadcast on German radio in mid-April 1941. The rhyme was, according to Davet, chanted ‘autour des terrasses des luxueux cafés des principales villes du Moyen-Orient’ (Davet, *Double affaire*, p. 63).
- 101 Statement reproduced in a report sent by HC Dentz to the MAE, quoted in Metzger, *Empire colonial*, pp. 344–5.
- 102 AAPA R61169, IAC (Beirut) to President of IAC (Turin), Activity report of the delegation, 11 January 1941. For a detailed account of Dentz’s actions in the Levant see S. ‘Aṭā Allāh, *Jīnarālāt al-sharq. dūr al-ʿaskariyyūn al-ajānīb fī-l-ʿālam al-ʿarabī bayna-l-ḥarbayn*, London: Dar al-Saqi, 1995, pp. 149–65.

- 103 See Hourani, *Syria and Lebanon*, pp. 234–6.
- 104 Khoury, *Syria*, pp. 590–91.
- 105 CAOM 917, d. 1, Secrétariat d'Etat à la Guerre (Vichy), Bulletin mensuel de renseignement sur les pays musulmans, 30 April 1941, p. 445. See also AA R 61169, Deutsche Waffensteinstandskommission (Wiesbaden) to AA, 'Lage in Syrien', April 18, 1941, Anhang.
- 106 Noteworthy is an assessment made by the Général d'Armée of Free France, according to which Hentig was not directly involved in the turmoil of spring 1941. From a German perspective, the report noted, these tensions were premature, see Nantes 2414, Général d'Armée (Cairo), Report 'Etat du problème syrien', 31 March 1941, p. 2.
- 107 Rayyis, *Al-kitāb – II*, p. 44.
- 108 AAPA R61169, Report by Hentig to AA, 'Groß-Arabien und die Lage in Syrien', 26 February 1941, p. 4. Hentig provided a list of persons that had faced French reprisals for their relations with Hentig during his stay in early 1941. See letter Hentig (Beirut) to Dentz [?], 10 February 1941 (HP).
- 109 See Grobba, *Männer*, pp. 206–9.
- 110 See AAPA R61123, Woermann (AA), 'Aufzeichnung zur arabischen Frage', 7 March 1941.
- 111 AAPA R29764, Woermann (AA) to RAM, 15 April 1941.
- 112 Metzger, *Empire colonial*, p. 348.
- 113 T. Albord and L. Dillemann, 'Le facteur allemand dans l'affaire de la Syrie', *Ecrits de Paris*, 1972, p. 74, and Metzger, *Empire colonial*, pp. 350–51.
- 114 Cf. Davet, *Double affaire*, pp. 64–77.
- 115 Metzger, *Empire colonial*, p. 358, and Albord, *L'armée française*, pp. 137–8. See also AAPA R 29764, von Ritter (AA), 9 May 1941, and Grobba, *Männer*, pp. 231–2.
- 116 For a personal account of this mission see R. Rahn, *Ruheloses Leben. Aufzeichnungen und Erinnerungen*, Diederichs Verlag: Düsseldorf, 1949, pp. 152–81.
- 117 Khālid al-'Azm recounts in his memoirs that he was having tea with General Dentz when the first German planes were heard approaching Damascus, 'Azm, *Mudhakkirāt*, p. 215.
- 118 Already on 12 May, the British Consul General had approached the French High Commissioner to inquire about the landing of German planes, see AAPA R29764, Rahn to Chef AO, 12 May 1941.
- 119 AAPA R29926, Rahn (Westfalen) to AA, 'Bericht über die deutsche Mission in Syrien vom 9. Mai bis 11. Juli 1941', 30 July 1941, p. 25, AAPA R29764, Gehrcke [Grobba] (Baghdad) to Chef AO, 21 May 1941, and AAPA R29924, Telegram No. 59, Rahn, 27 May 1941.
- 120 AAPA R29764, Kohlhaas/Gehrcke [Grobba] (Baghdad) to Chef AO, 17 May 1941, and AAPA R29764, Gehrcke [Grobba] (Baghdad) to Chef AO, 21 May 1941.
- 121 Cf. Rayyis, *Al-kitāb – II*, p. 72.
- 122 See AAPA R29764, Ettel to AA, 3 June 1941.
- 123 Metzger, *Empire colonial*, p. 363.
- 124 Rahn noted the need to establish a local contact that could be trusted as an intermediary to Ḥusaynī. According to Rahn, the Abwehr had distanced itself from Quwwatī; Rahn himself continued to see Quwwatī as an important contact. See AAPA R29924, Telegram No. 56, Rahn, 27 May 1941, p. 2.
- 125 E.g., the pro-German leadership of the Arab Club – among them Imām and Georges Sharbayn, a former Syrian representative of the German company Telefunken – was amnestied on 20 June 1941. See AAPA R29924, Telegram No. 157, Rahn, 20 June 1941. 'Ādil and Nabīh al-'Azma were also amnestied. Shortly before the end of hostilities in Syria and Lebanon, 'Ādil al-'Azma called on Rahn to negotiate with Dentz the release of 500 persons who had been imprisoned for their political activities.

- 126 Rayyis, *Al-kitāb – II*, pp. 86–7.
- 127 See AAPA R29764, Telegram No. 100, Rahn, 10 June 1941, and AAPA R29764, Telegram No. 162, Rahn, 20 June 1941.
- 128 AAPA R29764, Telegram No. 89, Rahn, 8 June 1941. Among those for whom Rahn had asked permission to enter Turkey were Fawzī al-Qawuqjī, Saʿadī Kaylānī, ʿUmar Abu Naṣr, and Istuany, as well as the former representatives of the German consulate and/or paid informants of the Abwehr, Najīb Kanaʿan [Canaan], Camile Sultan, ʿAfif Tībī, Kāmil Murūwa. Arrangements for the transit of their families were also requested.
- 129 AAPA R29764, Telegram No. 197, Rahn, 29 June 1941. See also AAPA R29926, Rahn to AA, 'Bericht über die deutsche Mission in Syrien vom 9. Mai bis 11. Juli 1941', 30 July 1941, p. 47.
- 130 AAPA R29764, Telegram No. 156, Rahn, 20 June 1941, and AAPA R29924, Telegram No. 173, Rahn, 23 June 1941.
- 131 Nantes 2, France Libre au Levant, SGA, 'B. propagande allemande parmi les nationaux', undated (probably August 1941), p. 10.
- 132 See Rayyis, *Al-kitāb – II*, pp. 105–6.
- 133 AAPA R29764, Telegram No. 214, Rahn, 6 July 1941. Rahn mentions a ceremony that was organized on this occasion; it had provoked enthusiastic exclamations about Hitler and Germany. News of this event soon spread, encouraging other groups – among them several Bedouin leaders – to approach Rahn and express their willingness to join the resistance. See AAPA R29926, Rahn, 'Bericht über die deutsche Mission in Syrien vom 9. Mai bis 11. Juli 1941', 30 July 1941, p. 50. Akram Ḥūrānī recounts that during one of the meetings at the Baron Hotel in Aleppo, which brought together the leaders of the anti-British resistance, a German official had told them to prepare for the arrival of the German Wehrmacht through the Caucasus (Ḥūrānī, *Mudhakkirāt*, p. 230).
- 134 AAPA R29764, Telegram No. 218, Rahn, 8 July 1941. Cf. Rayyis, *Al-kitāb – II*, pp. 159–64.
- 135 AAPA R29764, Telegram No. 221, Rahn, 10 July 1941, and AAPA R29925, Telegram No. 58, Papen (Ankara) to AA, 14 July 1941.
- 136 AAPA R67482, Rühle (Berlin) to RAM, 'Aufzeichnung betr. der Rundfunkpropaganda nach dem arabischen Raum', 5 May 1941, p. 7.
- 137 AAPA R67482, AA, 'Aufzeichnung Betr. Sitzung beim Herrn RAM über die Propaganda nach den unter dem Joche Großbritanniens stehenden Ländern', 22 May 1941, p. 5.
- 138 Davet, *Double affaire*, p. 146.
- 139 AAPA R29924, Telegram No. 122, Rahn, 13 June 1941. See also Davet, *Double affaire*, p. 146.
- 140 AAPA R29926, Rahn (Westfalen) to AA, 'Bericht über die deutsche Mission in Syrien vom 9. Mai bis 11. Juli 1941', 30 July 1941, p. 38.

## 5 Nazism in retreat: the fading of an option and the battle for independence (1941–1945)

- 1 Quoted according to S. Z. Thompson, *Anglo-Free France relations in the Levant, 1941–1945*, Ann Arbor, MI: UMI 1990, p. 47.
- 2 Cf. Thompson, *Relations*, p. 45, and P. S. Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate. The politics of Arab nationalism 1920–1945*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, pp. 592–6.
- 3 See e.g. L. Hirszowicz, *The Third Reich and the Arab East*, London: Routledge, pp. 259–68, and C. Metzger, *L'Empire colonial français dans la stratégie du Troisième Reich (1936–1945)*, vol. I, Brussels: Peter Lang Verlag, pp. 557–64.

- 4 For Qawuqjī's relations with the German regime and his stay in Germany during the war, see G. Höpp, 'Ruhmloses Zwischenspiel. Fawzi al-Qawuqji in Deutschland, 1941–1947', in P. Heine (ed.) *al-Rafidayn. Jahrbuch zur Geschichte und Kultur des modernen Iraks*, Würzburg: Ergon-Verlag, 1993, pp. 19–44. The memoirs of Qawuqji and Munīr al-Rayyis and the collected letters of the 'Aẓma-brothers offer additional information about Qawuqjī's intentions and ambitions: cf. K. Qāsimiyya (ed.), *Mudhakkirāt Fawzī Qawuqjī*, Damascus: Dār al-Dabbās, 1990, pp. 288–96, M. Rayyis, *Al-kitāb al-dhahabī li-l-thawrāt al-waṭaniyya fī-l-mashriq al-ʿarabī. ḥarb al-ʿirāq ʿām 1941*, Damascus: Maṭābīʿ Alif Bāʾ, 1977, pp. 170–212, and Qāsimiyya, *Al-raʿīl al-ʿarabī al-awwal. ḥayāt wa awrāq Nabīh wa ʿĀdil al-ʿAẓma*, London: Riad al-Rayyis, 1991, p. 427–32.
- 5 The exact date of Qawuqjī's arrival in Berlin and the composition of his entourage is unclear, see AAPA R29925, Telegram Moellhausen, 26 June 1941, Rayyis, *Al-kitāb*, p. 155, and Höpp, 'Qawuqjī', p. 25.
- 6 Cf. Höpp, 'Qawuqjī', p. 26, and for a general insight into the role of the Sonderstab F: Hirszowicz, *Third Reich*, pp. 197–201, and K.-M. Mallmann and M. Cüppers, *Halbmond und Hakenkreuz. Das Dritte Reich, die Araber und Palästina*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006, pp. 89–104.
- 7 BArchivPAA, Nr. 61179, OKW (Felmy), 'Dienstanzweisung für Sonderstab F', 21 September 1941 (HP), and BArchiv AA, Nr. 61179, AA (Grobba), 'Der Sonderstab F', 23 September 1941 (HP), p. 3.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 See Qāsimiyya, *Mudhakkirāt*, p. 289, and Höpp, 'Qawuqjī', p. 27.
- 10 It is noteworthy that Qawuqjī recounts a dialogue in July between himself and German officials in which he insisted that it was not up to him to decide upon cooperation; such a decision lay with the Arab leaders who were present in Germany, explicitly referring to Ḥusaynī and Kaylānī (Qāsimiyya, *Mudhakkirāt*, p. 289) Yet, both Arab leaders arrived in Berlin only in November, putting into doubt the consistency of his narrative.
- 11 In contrast to Qawuqjī's own account, Grobba stressed the need for a control of Qawuqjī's political ambitions, voicing concern about Qawuqjī's attempts to be accepted as the sole political representative of the Arab cause (See BArchivP AA R61179, AA (Grobba), 'Der Sonderstab F', 23 September 1941 (HP), p. 4–5). Cf. also Mallmann and Cüppers, *Halbmond*, p. 91.
- 12 B. P. Schröder, *Deutschland und der Mittlere Osten im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Göttingen: Musterschmidt, 1975, p. 177.
- 13 Rayyis, *Al-kitāb – II*, pp. 161–5.
- 14 Rayyis, *Al-kitāb – II*, p. 176.
- 15 K. Murūwa, *Bayrūt, birlīn, bayrūt*, London: Riad El-Rayyes, 1991, p. 24.
- 16 ʿĀdil al-ʿAẓma had left Berlin for Istanbul to help coordinating efforts to arrange Ḥusaynī's and Kaylānī's flight from Iran, Qāsimiyya, *Al-raʿīl*, p. 99.
- 17 See letter by ʿĀdil al-ʿAẓma to Qawuqjī, BArchiv MARCH-F, Rh 24–68, 15 September 1941 (HP), pp. 12–17, and letter by Qawuqjī to ʿAẓma, 27 October 1941, reproduced in Qāsimiyya, *Al-raʿīl*, pp. 427–8. Cf. also the script of debates between Arab leaders in Istanbul outlining the Arab position for future negotiations with the Axis, led by Kaylānī (undated, probably September 1941), reproduced in Qāsimiyya, *Al-raʿīl*, pp. 428–9. A detailed account of these consultations among Arab personalities in Turkey is provided in the memoirs of Akram Zuʿaytir (A. Zuʿaytir, *Min aḥl ummatī. min mudhakkirāt Akram Zuʿaytir 1939–1946 – vol. II*, Beirut: al-Muʿassasa al-ʿArabiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr, 1994, pp. 77–92). The pro-German atmosphere is also revealed in a comment attributed to Kaylānī, who appeared very optimistic about a prospect agreement with Germany. Germany, according to Kaylānī, was now prepared to offer the Arabs whatever they called for, 'the only thing we have to do is to write down what we want' (Zuʿaytir, *Min aḥl ummatī*, p. 81).

- 18 An overview of Kaylānī's activities in Berlin is given by R. Dieterich, 'Rashīd 'Alī al-Kailānī in Berlin. Ein irakischer Nationalist in NS-Deutschland', in P. Heine (ed.), *al-Rafidayn. Jahrbuch zur Geschichte und Kultur des modernen Iraq – Band III*, Würzburg: Ergon-Verlag, 1993, pp. 47–79. With regard to Ḥusaynī's negotiations in Berlin and Rome, 1941–43, see 'A. R. 'Abd al-Ghanī, *Almāniyā al-nāziyya wa filasṭīn, 1933–1945*, Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1995, pp. 317–60, and Hirsowicz, *Third Reich*, pp. 211–28 and 250–68.
- 19 See Hirsowicz, *Third Reich*, pp. 214–18.
- 20 Hirsowicz, *Third Reich*, p. 227.
- 21 See F. Grobba, *Männer und Mächte im Orient. 25 Jahre diplomatischer Tätigkeit im Orient*, Göttingen: Musterschmidt, 1967, pp. 287–92.
- 22 See Qawuqjī's memorandum to the AA with regard to the urgent need for concrete German steps in support of the Arab world, BArchiv MArch-F, Rh 24–68, Qawuqjī to AA, 24 October 1941 (HP), and Höpp, 'Qawuqjī', pp. 29–32. See also Qāsimiyya, *Al-ra'īl*, pp. 99–113.
- 23 The German ambassador in Turkey, von Papen, was in frequent contact with many of the Arab expatriates. See e.g. Murūwa, *Bayrūt*, pp. 18–21, and 'A. Arslān, *Mudhakkirāt al-amīr 'Adil Arslān – al-juz' al-awwal – 1934–1945*, Beirut: al-Dār al-Taqaddumiyya, 1983, p. 349.
- 24 Qāsimiyya, *Al-ra'īl*, p. 100, and Arslān, *Mudhakkirāt*, p. 369. Grobba confirms that Arslān had twice rejected his invitations to Berlin; he would only accept the invitation once Germany had formally declared its support for Arab independence (F. Grobba, *Die deutsche Ausnutzung der arabischen Eingeborenenbewegung im zweiten Weltkrieg*, Foreign Military Manuscripts FMS, P-207, National Archives, Washington, p. 72).
- 25 Draft of a letter by Nabīh al-'Azma to Ḥusaynī, 20 April 1942, reproduced in Qāsimiyya, *Al-ra'īl*, p. 438.
- 26 Ibid. A letter by al-'Azma addressed to the AA was no less explicit, revealing the personal frustration about the apparent standstill (draft of a letter by Nabīh al-'Azma to AA (undated, probably August 1942), reproduced in Qāsimiyya, *Al-ra'īl*, pp. 441–2).
- 27 Arslān, *Mudhakkirāt*, p. 360.
- 28 AAPA BA 61123, Telegram Sonderstab F (Meyer-Ricks) to OKW, 17 November 1941. An extensive list of Arab Syrian and Lebanese speakers on Radio Athens is provided in: Nantes 95, SGA (Damascus), Report, 14 May 1943.
- 29 See letter Grobba to 'Adil al-'Azma, 7 May 1942, reproduced in Qāsimiyya, *Al-ra'īl*, p. 440. Murūwa's mission was part of the work of the 'Arabischen Nachrichtenbüro' led by Grobba, see Grobba, *Ausnutzung*, p. 72. In his memoirs, Murūwa does not provide further information about his work. His account, which was first published in *al-Ḥayāt* in 1946, ends with his arrival in Sofia. Murūwa had left Turkey in February 1942 for Vienna and Berlin, where he spent March and April before leaving to Bulgaria. Murūwa visited Berlin again three times in 1943, but resided most of the following two years in Sofia (Murūwa, *Bayrūt*, pp. 244–9).
- 30 Nantes 75, SGA (Damascus), Report, 21 January 1942. According to the report, even among the scouts, who were generally considered pro-German by the French administration, no enthusiasm was noted about joining this formation.
- 31 See Nantes 2409, General d'Armée/Délégue Général (Damascus), Note 'A/S de la propagande ennemie', 14 November 1941 and Nantes 2, SGA (Beirut), Renseignement 606 'Propagande Nazie', 14 November 1941, and Mallmann and Cüppers, *Halbmond*, pp. 155–8.
- 32 See Nantes 68, SGA (Beirut), Information 703 'Le Parti des "Arabes Libres"', 5 December 1941, and Nantes 2, Information 'Eléments pro-axistes d'Alep', 29 April 1942.
- 33 For Syria, see Nantes 2412, Délégation Générale (Damascus), Bulletin d'Information Hebdomadaire No. 2, 29 June – 5 July 1941, pp. 2–3; reactions in Lebanon are described in Sh. Juḥā, *M'raka maṣīr lubnān fī 'ahd al-intidāb al-firansī 1918–1946 – al-thānī*, Beirut: Maktabat Ra's Bayrūt, 1995, pp. 724–5.

- 34 Khoury, *Syria*, pp. 592–4, and Juḥā, *Maʿraka – II*, pp. 730–36.
- 35 For Syria, cf. Khoury, *Syria*, pp. 592–8. In Lebanon, immediate rejection was expressed by the Constitutional Bloc of Bishāra al-Khūrī, Riyāḍ al-Ṣulḥ, Katāʾib, and others, see Juḥā, *Maʿraka – II*, pp. 747–54.
- 36 Nantes 2409, 'Compte-rendu au sujet des menées anti-françaises dans les territoires autonomes alaouites', 10 August 1941.
- 37 Nantes 2, SGA (Beirut), Information 'Salah Osman Beyhum', 18 March 1942.
- 38 Nantes 2, SGA (Beirut), 'Constitution d'une cinquième colonne', 25 August 1941.
- 39 See e.g. the list of nearly one hundred locals who had previously entertained contacts with Axis officials: Nantes 2, SGA, 'Individus ayant eu des contacts avec des délégués allemands', 3 October 1941. For the activities of German officials, see Nantes 2411, SGA (Beirut), Information 409 'Propagande Nazie en Turquie', 17 October 1941, and Nantes 2, SGA, Bulletin 461, 29 October 1941. Information was also gathered about contacts between those in German exile, such as Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Ṭawīl and Kāmil Murūwa, and their families back in Lebanon and Syria. Apparently, German agents provided financial support for some of these families, see Nantes 2411, SGA, Information 594 'Agents Allemands', 13 December 1941.
- 40 Nantes 2411, Conseiller Administratif (Tripoli), Report No. 1889, 17 October 1941, p. 3.
- 41 French authorities feared that German agents might, as in the past, masquerade as persecuted Jews to enter the mandates (Nantes 2, SGA (Beirut), Circulaire 526, 3 December 1942). In November 1941, French sources had noted the existence of trafficking networks in southern Syria, which supposedly involved 'German Jews from Palestine' who were actively engaged in pro-German propaganda – confirming once again French fears of German agents posing as German Jews (Nantes 2409, Extrait du Bulletin d'Information Hebdomadaire – 24. au 30 novembre 1941 'Sur la propagande pro-nazie'). The execution of a number of Axis agents is mentioned in a report about a revival of activities of the SNP, Nantes 2162, SSL (Homs), 'Notice sur le PPS à Homs', 15 July 1942, p. 2. News of the executions of four suspects made it to Istanbul (see Arslān, *Mudhakkirāt*, p. 360). In December 1943, three members of the SNP were sentenced to death in Aleppo for their relations with Germany (see Nantes 2162, SGA (Beirut), Information 'Mémoire du Parti Communiste Libanais à la Chambre des Députés', 24 March 1945, p. 2).
- 42 See Nantes 2, SGA (Beirut), Circulaire 337, 17 August 1942.
- 43 See for an account of these consultations by Atāsī's son 'Adnān, M. R. Atāsī, *Hāshim al-Atāsī. ḥayāthuhu – ʿaṣruhu 1873–1960*, Damascus, 2005, pp. 241–4.
- 44 Khoury, *Syria*, pp. 596–7.
- 45 In a report about a meeting of nationalists from Hama, who had approached Quwwatī and Atāsī to inform them about supposed German plans in the region, Quwwatī is quoted as saying: 'Nous ne pouvons nous départir de notre union avec les Allemands' (Nantes 2411, Délégué-Adjoint Hama et Homs, Information 2161, 23 September 1941, p. 1). See also Nantes 2, Report 'Activités de l'Axe dans le Proche-Orient. Organisation d'une cinquième colonne', August 1941, p. 8.
- 46 According to French sources, the Muslim Youth in early 1941 tried to set up a group called 'Jeunesse Arabe amie des Allemands' (see Nantes 2, Rapport 'Propagande Allemande parmi les Nationaux', no date).
- 47 Nantes 67, SGA (Beirut), Information 17 'Politique Locale', 22 July 1941, p. 2.
- 48 Nantes 2396, leaflet of the SNP 'Hadhā balāgh li-l-nās', 25 September 1941.
- 49 See e.g. Nantes 2396, SSL (Tripoli), Information 26, 9 August 1942, and Nantes 2162, SSL (Homs-Hama), 'Notice sur le PPS à Homs', 15 July 1942.
- 50 Nantes 2396, Délégation de la FL auprès de la République Libanaise, 'Liste des individus à arrêter ou à mettre sous surveillance en cas de troubles', 5 March 1942.
- 51 Nantes 2396, Police Libanaise (Beirut), Information, 19 March 1942.
- 52 Nantes 68, SGA, Information 703 'Le Parti des "Arabes Libres"', 3 December 1941.

- 53 Nantes 68, SGA, Information 723 'Ligue d'Action Nationale', 11 December 1941, and Nantes 2, SGA (Beirut), Information 860 'Mouvement anti-Alliés', 8 July 1942.
- 54 R. Khūrī, *Ma'ālim al-wa'ī al-qawmī*, Beirut: Dār al-Makshūf, 1941, p. 92. The USSR was among the first states to recognize the Kaylānī-government after the coup of 1941, I. Marqīš, *Tārīkh al-aḥzāb al-shuyū'īya fī-l-waṭan al-'arabī*, Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalī'a, 1964, p. 48.
- 55 See Q. Qala'ajī, *Tajribat 'arabī fī-l-ḥizb al-shuyū'ī*, Beirut: Dār al-Kātib al-'Arabī, no date, pp. 100–101, and Z. al-Mallā, *Safḥāt min tārīkh al-ḥizb al-shuyū'ī al-sūrī 1924–1954*, Damascus: al-Ahālī, 1994, pp. 138–42.
- 56 Nantes 2412, Letter Bakdāsh/Riqdā to Catroux, 11 July 1941, p. 2.
- 57 Nantes 20, SG (Beirut), 'Détenus politiques', 13 August 1941, p. 2. See also N. Jazmātī, *Al-ḥizb al-shuyū'ī al-sūrī 1924–1958*, Damascus: Maṭba'at Ibn Ḥayān, 1990, p. 146.
- 58 See e.g. Stalin's speech to the Soviet population on the occasion of Germany's attack against the USSR, Nantes 20, Pamphlet 'Khiṭāb stalīn', August 1941, and the booklets: Kh. Bakdāsh, *Al-'arab wa-l-thawra al-firansīyya*, 1942, and F. al-Ḥilū, *Almāniyā fī ṭarīq al-inḥiyār*, Beirut: Ṣawt al-Sha'b, 1943.
- 59 Kh. Bakdāsh/F. al-Ḥilū, *Sūriyā wa lubnān wa-l-ḥarb al-ḥādir*, p. 13.
- 60 'A. Turkmānī, *Al-aḥzāb al-shuyū'īyya fī-l-mashriq al-'arabī*, Beirut: Al-Ān Culture, 2002, p. 95.
- 61 Communist Party in Syria and Lebanon, *Bayān ilā-l-sha'b. al-majlis al-waṭanī al-'amm*, 1941, p. 11. See also 'A. Hannā, *Al-ḥaraka al-munāhiḍa li-l-fāshīyya fī sūriyā wa lubnān 1933–45*, Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, p. 93.
- 62 Nantes 20, SG (Beirut), Note 'Réunion projetée par le Parti Communiste le 1er mai', April 1942.
- 63 See Sh. Kaylānī, *Al-ḥizb al-shuyū'ī al-sūrī*, Damascus: al-Ahālī, 2003, pp. 62–67, and T. Y. Ismael and J. S. Ismael, *The Communist Movement in Syria and Lebanon*, Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1998, pp. 33–7.
- 64 Ismael and Ismael, *Communist Movement*, p. 34.
- 65 The same was true for parts of the Assyrian community: see the pamphlets of Youaw K. Zodo, a Beirut affiliate of the Assyrian National Federation in the USA, Y. K. Youaw, *L'écrasement des Germano-Fascistes est la seule garantie de l'existence des petites nations*, Beirut, 1942/3, and Y. K. Youaw, *Le monde après l'écrasement des Germano-Fascistes et la Question Assyrienne*, Beirut, 1944.
- 66 A. Maduyān, *Ḥayāt 'alā al-mitrās. dhikrayāt wa mashāhadāt*, Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 1986, pp. 221–33.
- 67 Nantes 68, SGA (Beirut), 'Ligue des Arméniens de Syrie et du Liban pour la défense de l'Arménie', December 1941.
- 68 Maduyān, *Ḥayāt*, p. 223.
- 69 Nantes 68, Resolution to Catroux, Beirut, 9 November 1941.
- 70 See Hannā, *Al-ḥaraka*, pp. 106–8.
- 71 See K. Murūwa, 'Majallatunā al-thaqāfa tharwatunā al-qawmiyya', *al-Ṭarīq*, January–February 2002, pp. 231–237, and M. Dakrūb, 'Fī masīrat 'al-ṭarīq' – tārīkh wa marāḥil', *al-Ṭarīq*, January–February 2002, pp. 259–77.
- 72 Q. Qala'ajī, 'Risālāt al-'uṣba', *al-Ṭarīq*, 20 December 1941, p. 2.
- 73 See e.g. Nantes 68, SG (Damascus), Information 1248 'A/S de la ligue féminine antifasciste', 27 July 1942, and Nantes 68, SGA, Information 'Ligue antifasciste', 24 October 1942.
- 74 Nantes 95, 'Rapport d'enquête au sujet de Omar Fakhury' (no date or author). An early speech by Fakhūrī about the events of war is reproduced in *al-Ṭarīq*, December 1941, pp. 16–17. For a speech by Khūrī, see *al-Tarīq*, 18 January 1944, pp. 16–17. Fakhūrī's antifascist engagement was a major argument used to promote his bid for parliament (Kh. Bakdāsh, 'Umar Fakhūrī, ḥāmil liwa al-ruḥ al-jadīda fī lubnān, Beirut, 1943, pp. 7–8). In early 1945, Fakhūrī published a book recounting these years and the



- struggle against Fascism: 'U. Fakhūrī, *Al-ḥaqīqa al-lubnāniyya. khawāṭir wa ahādīth*, Beirut: Dar al-Āfāq al-Jadīda, 1982.
- 75 See e.g. Nantes 2, SGA (Beirut), Information, 'La Propagande axiste au Liban', 16 June 1943. The extent of public interest in these events can be assessed through information provided by Nasūh Bābīl, then editor of the Damascene newspaper *al-Ayyām*. According to his memoirs, the British Information Ministry had in late December 1942 invited a joint Syrian–Lebanese delegation of journalists to visit al-'Alamayn. While Bābīl was finally prevented from travelling, Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Nuṣūlī (*Bayrūt*), Charles Helou (*Le Jour*), and Muḥammad Ṭlās (*al-Shabāb*) were part of the delegation (cf. N. Bābīl, *Shihāfa wa siyāsa. Sūriyā fī-l-qarn al-'ashrīn*, Beirut: Riad El-Rayyes Books, 2001, p. 167).
- 76 Nantes 2162, Report 'Contre-Espionnage – Situation au 25 Septembre 1943' and Nantes 2, SGA (Saida), 'Propagande axiste', 24 May 1943. Despite such decline of activities of local sympathizers and collaborators with the Axis, the French Sûreté Générale reported several infiltrations by German agents. See Nantes 2, Commandement en chef des FFL (Beirut), Note de service 'Menaces d'activité ennemie', 29 June 1943, and Nantes 2, SGA (Aleppo), 'Agents ennemis', 1 October 1943. One goal of German agents was to consolidate relations with local collaborators among Syrian-Kurdish clans, which had entertained contacts with the Axis since 1939. Despite the provision of money and arms, these groups now appeared less inclined to support the Abwehr in its preparations for sabotage missions in the region (see Nantes 2162, Report 'Contre Espionnage – Situation au 25 Septembre 1943', pp. 5–6).
- 77 See J. A. Melki, 'Syria and the State Department 1937–47', *Middle Eastern Studies*, no. 1, 1997, pp. 93–6.
- 78 Khoury, *Syria*, pp. 598–604, R. El-Solh, *Lebanon and Arabism: National Identity and State Formation*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2004, pp. 195–222, and K. M. Firro, *Inventing Lebanon. Nationalism and the state under the mandate*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2003, pp. 201–7.
- 79 Juḥā, *Ma'raka – II*, pp. 815–21, and El-Solh, *Lebanon*, p. 215.
- 80 Juḥā, *Ma'raka – II*, pp. 821–9, El-Solh, *Lebanon*, pp. 216–17, and leaflet signed by Faraj Allāh al-Ḥilū entitled 'Mudhakkirāt al-ḥizb al-shuyu'ī al-lubnānī bi-shān ahdāth lubnān al-akhīra', 15 November 1943.
- 81 Juḥā, *Ma'raka – II*, pp. 877–83.
- 82 E. Thompson, *Colonial Citizens. Republican rights, paternal privilege, and gender in French Syria and Lebanon*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, p. 244.
- 83 'A. I. Barakat, *The Doctrine of National-Socialism. A preliminary study*, MA thesis presented to American University of Beirut, July 1944, pp. 211–212 (spelling and grammar as in the original.)
- 84 See Khoury, *Syria*, pp. 604–12.
- 85 The details of this formation process are disputed. These controversies are secondary to the context of this study. Cf. for two different assessments: N. Salem-Babikian, 'Michel 'Aflaq: A biographic outline', *Arab Studies Quarterly*, no. 2, 1980, pp. 162–79, and K. D. Watenpaugh, "'Creating Phantoms": Zaki al-Arsuzi, the Alexandretta crisis, and the formation of modern Arab nationalism in Syria', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, no. 28, 1996, pp. 363–89. See also N. M. Kaylani, 'The rise of the Syrian Ba'ṯh, 1940–1958: Political success, party failure', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, no. 3, 1972, pp. 3–9. Kaylani depicts the early Ba'ṯh party as a successor to the League of National Action.
- 86 See S. Jundī, *al-Ba'ṯh*, Beirut: Dār al-Nahār, 1969, p. 21, and Watenpaugh, 'Phantoms', pp. 368–82.
- 87 'Aflaq's early writings are reproduced in, among others, Dh. Qarqūṭ, *Mishl 'Aflaq: al-kitābāt al-ūlā ma' dirāsa jadīda li-l-sīrat ḥayātīhi*, Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr, 1993.

- 88 S. Biṭār/M. 'Aflaq, *Al-qawmiyya al-'arabiyya wa mawqifuhā min al-shuyū'iyya*, Damascus: Maktab al-Ba'th al-'Arabī, 1944, pp. 1–15.
- 89 See Nantes 93, SGA (Damascus), Direction Syrie, 'Comité de la renaissance arabe', 18 May 1944. Cf. also Qarqūṭ, 'Aflaq, p. 54, and Salem-Babikian, 'Aflaq', p. 170.
- 90 Arsūzī reportedly rejected the request, declaring: 'I do not cooperate with anyone. It is better that we stand on our own feet.' When Jundī suggested that this was a rare opportunity, Arsūzī retorted: 'Are you crazy? The British are encircling Syria from all sides, they will soon occupy us. Do you want us to be hanged like traitors – without even any profit for the people?!' (Jundī, *Al-ba'th*, p. 29) However, Jundī's account indicates that this position was primarily due to the wrong timing of such cooperation, not necessarily due to ideological opposition.
- 91 Jundī, *Ba'th*, pp. 28–29.
- 92 Jundī, *Ba'th*, p. 27.
- 93 For a general insight into the relevant aspects of Ba'thist thought, cf. W. Schmucker, 'Studien zur Baath-Ideologie. I. Teil', *Die Welt des Islams*, no. 1–4, 1973, pp. 47–80, and Ḥ. Ṣāghīyya, *Qawmiyyū al-mashriq al-'arabī. min Drayfūs ilā Ghārūdī*, Beirut: Riad El-Rayyes Books, 2000, pp. 91–146, and J. Landis, 'Zakī al-Arsuzi and the Ba'th Party: The connection between his religious beliefs and his philosophy of the nation', paper presented to the *Third Conference on the Syrian Land*, August 2000, Erlangen.
- 94 Z. al-Arsūzī, *Al-'aqbariyya al-'arabiyya fī lisānihā*, Damascus: Maktabat al-Kashshāf, 1943, reproduced in Zakī al-Arsūzī, *Al-mu'allafāt al-kāmila vol. I*, Damascus: Maṭābī'i-l-Idāra al-Siyāsiyya l-il-Jaysh wa-l-Quwwāt al-Musallaha, 1972. See for a detailed discussion of Arsūzī's nationalist thought, Landis, 'Arsuzi', pp. 16–24.
- 95 M. 'Aflaq, 'Hawla-l-ma'raka al-intikhābiyya (24 July 1943)', in *Niḍāl al-ba'th fī sabīl al-waḥda, al-ḥuriyya wa-l-ishtirākīyya – Wathā'iq ḥizb al-ba'th al-'arabī al-ishtirākī – al-juz'al-awwal 1943–49*, Beirut: Dār al-Ta'lī'a, 1963, p. 33. Cf. also C. Schumann, *Radikalnationalismus in Syrien und Libanon. Politische Sozialisation und Elitenbildung 1930–1958*, Hamburg: Deutsches Orient Institut, 2001, pp. 264–5.
- 96 Cf. Schmucker, 'Studien', pp. 54–5.
- 97 M. 'Aflaq, *Dhikrā al-rusūl al-'arabī*, Damascus, 1943, p. 6. The text is based on a speech made by 'Aflaq on 5 April 1943 at a function at the Syrian University in Damascus.
- 98 Cf. Schmucker, 'Studien', pp. 63–4.
- 99 Biṭār and 'Aflaq, *Qawmiyya*, p. 6. See also P. Seale, *The Struggle for Syria. A study of post-war Arab politics 1945–1958*, London: Oxford University Press, 1965, pp. 148–63.
- 100 Ibid., pp. 10–11.
- 101 Ibid., p. 23.
- 102 Cf. Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, pp. 103–10, and J. Reissner, *Ideologie und Politik der Muslimbrüder Syriens*, Freiburg: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1980, p. 86.
- 103 Reissner, *Ideologie*, p. 90. Despite these links, it is important to note the existing differences that confronted some of these organizations. In contrast to most of these early Islamist movements, the predominantly Sunni organization *al-Najjāda* focused its early agitation on Arab nationalist rather than on Islamic arguments. See Nantes 74, Rapport 'Les Najjades' (unsigned), September–October 1944, and Nantes 2162, SGA, Information 'Activité anti-communiste', 14 October 1944.
- 104 Cf. e.g. Nantes 67, SGA (Damascus), 'Jeunesse musulmane', 19 March 1945, p. 2, and Nantes 67, SGA (Beirut), Information 'Politique locale', 22 July 1941, p. 1.
- 105 Nantes 67, SG (Damascus), 'Association des jeunes gens musulmans à Damas', 14 August 1941, and Nantes 67, Note 'Association "La Jeunesse de Mahomet"' (no date, probably November–December 1941), p. 2.

- 106 Nantes 67, SGA, 'Jeunesse musulmane', 19 March 1945, pp. 3–5.
- 107 Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, p. 267.
- 108 Nantes 2162, SGA, Information 'Entre communiste[s] et jeunes des Muhamed', 28 September 1944, p. 2 and Nantes 2162, SGA, Information 'Activité communiste', 5 February 1945.
- 109 Cf. Mallā, *Ṣafhāt*, pp. 149 and 174.
- 110 M. Sibā'ī, *Ahdāth al-ittijāhāt al-fikriyya fī-l-sharq al-'arabī*, 1945. Sibā'ī had spent most of the 1930s in Egypt, where he joined the Muslim Brotherhood. He returned to Damascus to become dean of the Faculty of Theology in 1940. See S. Moubayed, *Steel and silk. Men and women who shaped Syria 1900–2000*, Seattle, WA: Cune Press, 2006, p. 340, and Reissner, *Ideologie*, p. 123
- 111 J. Tuwaynī, *Al-'arab wa-l-hulafā'. Li-mādhā naḥnu ma' ahum? Mādhā nu' ammilu min fawzihih?* Beirut: al-Nahār, 1942 [?], p. 6. Tuwaynī's claim is noteworthy insofar as he states that Nazi Germans 'pretend to be God's chosen people' (Tuwaynī, *Al-'arab*, p. 4). The motive of 'God's chosen people' and the claim of a superiority to others were charges commonly used in attacks against Jews and Judaism. References to God were not prominent in Nazi racial theories.
- 112 J. Tuwaynī, 'Li-mādhā naḥnu ma' al-dimuqrāṭiyyāt?', *al-Adīb*, January 1942, p. 5.
- 113 Cf. e.g. Q. Qalā'ajī, 'Al-'unṣuriyya wa-l-isti'mār al-almānī', *al-Adīb*, September 1942, pp. 16–17, N. Qiyyād, 'Fridrik Nītsa wa dīn al-quwwa', *al-Adīb*, December 1942, pp. 29–32, and I. Abū Shabka, 'Irnst Rīnan', *al-Adīb*, December 1942, pp. 38–40.
- 114 J. Ṣalība, 'Al-tarbiyya al-qawmiyya', *al-Adīb*, November 1942, pp. 7–8.
- 115 Cf. Nantes 67, SG (Damascus), 'Association des jeunes gens musulmans à Damas', 11 August 1941.
- 116 Nazi ideology was central to the coverage of the journal; cf. e.g. M. Sulaymān, 'Ḥaqīqa al-ishtirākīyya al-waṭaniyya al-almāniyya', *al-Ṭarīq*, no. 4, 1942, p. 2 and 20–22.
- 117 Articles by 'Aqqād and Ḥusayn were frequently reproduced in the Syrian and Lebanese press. Cf. the critique of Fascist education, 'A. M. al-'Aqqād, 'Al-nizām wa-l-tarbiyya al-qawmiyya', *Fatā al-'Arab*, 15 August 1943.
- 118 Bāḥith 'Arabī [Kh. Bakdāsh], 'Mā hiyya al-dimuqrāṭiyya?', *al-Ṭarīq*, no. 4, 1942, p. 18. See also W. al-Bannī, 'Aqbariyya' al-'Aqqād!', *al-Ṭarīq*, no. 16, 1943, pp. 6–7.
- 119 I. F. Ibrāhīm, 'Mahammāt al-mar'a', *al-Ṭarīq*, no. 4, 1942, pp. 5–6. Cf. also M. al-Shalq, 'Al-mar'a al-'arabiyya fī-l-niḍāl ḍidd al-nāziyya', *al-Ṭarīq*, no. 6, 1942, pp. 20–21.
- 120 I. F. Ibrāhīm, 'Ḥuqūq jadīda', *al-Ṭarīq*, no. 20 (29 December 1943), p. 16. See also Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, p. 259.
- 121 Despite the persistence of sympathy for the German regime, the change in tone of the party's leadership was noteworthy. A public statement made by the head of its propaganda department echoed this change: 'You were told that independence has to be taken, and will not be given. In reality, independence is neither taken nor given, but has to be built' (Nantes 2396, Circulaire de la PPS, 1 September 1944). According to a French report, the author of this statement, Karīm Azkul, had studied – with the support of the German consulate – in Germany, where he had obtained a doctorate in philosophy (Nantes 2396, SGA (Zahle) 'Liste des Germanophiles et Italophiles dans la localité de Békaa', 10 February 1942). Cf. also Nantes 2396, Délégation auprès de la République Libanaise, 'Le Parti Populaire Libanais', 4 July 1944.
- 122 'Al-bilād kulluha taṭlubu waḍ' ḥaddin', *Ṣawt al-Sha'b*, 8 July 1944. Dozens of reports and editorials were dedicated to the SNP from late June 1944. For reactions in *al-Ṭarīq*, see e.g. Q. Qalā'ajī, 'Al-mu'allim al-ummī', *al-Ṭarīq*, no. 12 (3 July 1944), pp. 2–3.
- 123 Nantes 2396, SGA, Information 'Communistes et Parti Populaire Syrien', 27 June 1944.
- 124 Nantes 2, SGA (Beirut), Information 'M. Gabriel el-Murr', 23 March 1944. See also S. Mardam, *Syria's Quest for Independence 1939–1945*, Berkshire: Ithaca Press, 1994, pp. 125–6.

- 125 A French report noted that Riyāḍ al-Ṣulḥ had attempted to prevent any coverage of the motion in the local press, and to convince the supporters of the motion to retract. According to Ṣulḥ, his opposition was motivated by his fear that the motion would have placed Lebanon in a strange position: a country that still lacked an army in a state of war (Nantes 2, SGA (Beirut), Information 'M. Gabriel el-Murr', 23 March 1944, p. 2).
- 126 Concerning the reactions to the liberation of Paris, cf. Nantes 74, SGA, Information Spéciale 2094 'La Libération de Paris', 30 August 1944. A representative of the Jewish Agency in Beirut, who provided reports about local developments, noted the ambivalent reactions of the population. While the liberation of Paris was celebrated, people were concerned that 'Frenchmen [would] have their nose up in the air' again, as one Maronite informant said (CZA S25/4556, 'A letter from Beirut', 25 August 1944). A French report from Baalbek about the festivities on the occasion of the liberation of Paris on 25 August 1944 revealed the fragility of the French standing amongst the local population (see Nantes 74, SGA (Zahle), Information 'La Libération de Paris', 30 August 1944).
- 127 Cf. El-Solh, *Lebanon*, p. 244.
- 128 Nantes 2, SGA (Beirut), Information 'Les Germanophiles libano-syriens', 11 January 1944.
- 129 Cf. Nantes 2, SGA (Beirut), Information 'Riad Solh et les Germanophiles', 1 February 1944, and Nantes 2, SGA (Beirut), Information 171 'A/S De l'armée nationale', 25 February 1944, pp. 1–2. According to this report, Aḥmad Mukhtār al-Ṣulḥ, the brother of Sāmī al-Ṣulḥ and cousin of Riyāḍ al-Ṣulḥ, had studied in Turkey and Germany and, during the First World War, served as a member of the Ottoman military command under German General Falkenstein. Married to a German, he had entertained close relations with Axis agents in the times of Vichy-rule, and to Roser, the local head of the Abwehr, in particular.
- 130 Nantes 75, SGA (Tripoli), Information 'Sionisme', 18 October 1943.
- 131 Riyāḍ al-Ṣulḥ reportedly declared in a private conversation: 'It is in the context of the fight against the Jews that Arab unity will be established.' Ṣulḥ continued by lamenting the absence of those 'who, before and at the beginning of the war, distinguished themselves in the fight against the Jews – and who have now taken refuge in Turkey and Germany' (Nantes 98, SGA (Beirut), Information 'Mouvement Panarabe', 4. December 1943). Among the Lebanese Christians engaged in direct talks with representatives of the Jewish Agency were Alfred Naqqāsh and Ayyūb Thābit. Both expressed sympathies for the Zionist endeavours (notes of conversations in CZA S25/4549).
- 132 See Nantes 3, SGA (Beirut), Information 'Mouvement anti-Sioniste', 3 November 1944, and Nantes 68, SGA (Damascus), Information 'Mouvement anti-Sioniste', 2 November 1944.
- 133 Nantes 100, SGA (Damascus), Information 'Répercussions des événements en Europe', 27 December 1944.
- 134 Cf. e.g. 'Kuntu fī-l-jahannam al-nāzī', *al-Ṣayyād*, 22 December 1943, '14,000 yahūdī', *al-Akhbār*, 13 September 1944, and 'Jarā'im al-almān fī rūsiyā', *Ṣawt al-Sha'b*, 5 July 1944.
- 135 I. Zaydān, 'Filasṭīn awwalān', *al-Anṣār*, 1 June 1944.
- 136 See Hannā, *Al-ḥaraka*, pp. 101–4.
- 137 F. al-Ḥilū, 'Fa-li-tasquṭ al-ṣahyūniyya al-mujrima', *Ṣawt al-Sha'b*, 14 August 1944. Although not a member of the Communist Party, Ra'īf Khūrī contributed to the anti-Zionist agitation of the party. Referring to the Haavara agreement, Khūrī accused the Zionist movement of having 'turned the catastrophe [of the European Jews] into a profitable trade business', see R. Khūrī, 'Al-ṣahyūniyya wa-l-nāziyya', *Ṣawt al-Sha'b*, 28 September 1944.
- 138 The death of Roosevelt in April 1945 was noted with 'satisfaction' in parts of the public (Nantes 100, SGA (Damascus), Information 'A/S de la mort du président Roosevelt', 21 April 1945). Cf. Mardam, *Syria*, pp. 137–45.

- 139 Cf. S. Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate*, London: Oxford University Press, 1958, p. 350, but also Mardam, *Syria*, pp. 181–6, and Nantes 112, British Security Mission en Syrie et au Liban, ‘Bulletin hebdomadaire d’information, 7 au 14 avril 1945’.
- 140 Presidential Decree 201, *al-Jarīda-Rasmiyya*, no. 11 (1 March 1945), p. 337, and ‘Sūriyā tu’līn ḥālat al-ḥarb ‘alā al-miḥwar’, *Ṣawt al-Sha’b*, 28 February 1945. See also Mardam, *Syria*, pp. 182–3.
- 141 Nantes 112, SGA, Information ‘Séance parlementaire’, 28 February 1945, pp. 2–3. See ‘Al-barlamān al-lubnānī yuqarrir bi-l-ijmā’ i’lān al-ḥarb ‘alā al-miḥwar’, *Ṣawt al-Sha’b*, 28 February 1945.
- 142 See, e.g., ‘Al-lubnāniyyūn wa-l-sūriyyūn fī juyyūsh al-ḥulafā’, *al-Dabbūr*, no. 915 (10 August 1942). Similarly, the execution of Anṭūn al-Hājī, a Communist of Lebanese origins, in Paris in September 1941 by the German Gestapo was noted by the local public (‘Thalātha shuhadā’, *al-Ṭarīq*, no. 2 (31 January 1944)).
- 143 See also Nantes 2, SGA (Beirut), Information ‘Déclaration du Président Karame’, 2 March 1945. The report noted that the declaration did not provoke any hostile reactions, as all pro-Fascist organizations had disappeared from public life.
- 144 Nantes 112, SGA (Beirut), Information ‘La déclaration du guerre’, 1 March 1945.
- 145 Juḥā, *Mā raka – II*, pp. 915–18. In contrast, the week-long uncertainty about Lebanon’s invitation to the conference had sparked several reactions by the public. In a statement addressed to the Lebanese government by the recently created Arab nationalist party *al-Nidā’*, Kāzīm al-Ṣulḥ strongly protested against a possible non-invitation. Referring to a speech held by Churchill, in which Churchill had expressed his willingness to accept Germany and Japan as future members of the United Nations, Ṣulḥ questioned the rationale of preventing Lebanon from joining these nations (K. al-Ṣulḥ, ‘Mudhakkira ilā ra’īs majlis al-wuzarā’ al-lubnānī’, *al-Nidā’*, 9 March 1945).
- 146 ‘Ba’d ikhtiyār wafdinā li-l-mu’tamar’, *al-Kifāḥ*, 13 April 1945.

## 6 The Levant in May 1945: the defeat of Nazism and hopes for independence

- 1 ‘Muḏāharāt ibtihāj wa-l-farah’, *Ṣawt al-Sha’b*, 25 April 1945.
- 2 Nantes 2937, Rapport ‘Evolution des relations Franco-Syriennes depuis janvier 1945’ (undated, probably June 1945), p. 26. In Beirut, Workers’ Day celebrations on 29 April were attended by 8,000 people (Nantes 2162, SGA (Beirut), Information ‘Le Parti Communiste et la fête internationale du travail’, 30 April 1945). Support for France was also raised during a function organized in Zahle in celebration of Workers’ Day. Over 1,000 people attended (Nantes 2162, SGA (Zahle), Information ‘Activité communiste’, 7 May 1945).
- 3 Nantes 2937, Rapport ‘Evolution des relations Franco-Syriennes depuis janvier 1945’ (undated, probably June 1945), p. 26.
- 4 Nantes 67, SGA (Damascus), Information ‘Association des jeunes gens musulmans’, 8 May 1945, and Nantes 67, SGA (Homs), Information ‘Etat d’esprit à l’occasion de la victoire’, 15 May 1945.
- 5 S. Mardam, *Syria’s Quest for Independence 1939–1945*, Berkshire: Ithaca Press, 1994, pp. 198–9, and M. Albord, *L’Armée française et les états du Levant 1936–1946*, Paris: CNRS Editions, 2000, p. 280.
- 6 Nantes 2937, Rapport ‘Evolution des relations Franco-Syriennes depuis janvier 1945’ (undated, probably June 1945), pp. 1–5.
- 7 Albord, *Armée française*, pp. 280–82, Mardam, *Syria*, p. 199. The details of this exchange of troops are not entirely clear. See also A. Roshwald, *Estranged Bedfellows. Britain and France in the Middle East during the Second World War*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 198, and Nantes 75, Deuxième Bureau, Rapport d’Information ‘Distribution des tracts de protestation Libano-Syrienne’, 7 May 1945.

- 8 B. al-Khūrī, *Majmūʿat al-khuṭāb. aylūl 1943 – kanūn al-awwal 1951*, Beirut: 1951, p. 23.
- 9 Akram Ḥūrānī states in his memoirs that news from Sétif and Guelma in Algeria, where 15,000 to 40,000 persons had been killed on 8 May 1945 in clashes with the French army, had further intensified the tensions, cf. A. Ḥūrānī, *Mudhakkirāt Akram Ḥūrānī – vol. I*, Cairo: Maktabat Madbūlī, 2000, p. 393.
- 10 Cf. Nantes 67, SGA (Homs), Information ‘Etat d’esprit à l’occasion de la victoire’, 15 May 1945, p. 1, and Nantes 3, SGA (Beirut), Information ‘Chez les Mahometans’, 10 May 1945.
- 11 Albord, *Armée française*, p. 284–5, and Juḥā, *Maʿraka maṣīr lubnān fī ‘ahd al-intidāb al-firansī 1918–1946 – al-juzʿ al-thānī*, Beirut: Maktabat Raʾs Bayrūt, 1995, p. 936.
- 12 Nantes 2937, Rapport ‘Evolution des relations Franco-Syriennes depuis Janvier 1945’, undated, probably June 1945, p. 27, and Nantes 9, SGA (Damascus), Information ‘Manifestation anti-française du 9.5.45’, 15 May 1945.
- 13 Nantes 75, Deuxième Bureau (Beirut), Information ‘Incidents de la journée du 10 mai à Beyrouth’, 11 May 1945, p. 3.
- 14 Ibid., CZA 25/4556, Compte-rendu, Brigade des Recherches, Troupes du Levant, undated, probably 10 May 1945, and CZA 25/4556, Rapport du Chef de Patrouilles, Marine Nationale (Beirut), 9 May 1945. Cf. also Albord, *Armée française*, p. 285, and S. Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate*, London: Oxford University Press, 1958, p. 347. Albord assumes that this sign was mistakenly interpreted as a Nazi swastika, while it was most probably the swastika-like symbol of the SNP. In contrast, the report of the French military patrol explicitly states that the flag was marked with the address of its German producer: ‘Johans [sic] Liebig et Co. Reichenberg, Sudentenland’ (CZA 25/4556, Rapport du Chef de Patrouilles, Marine Nationale (Beirut), 9 May 1945).
- 15 Nantes 2, SGA (Beirut), Information ‘Les Anglais et la fête de la victoire’, 11 May 1945, and Nantes 3, SGA (Beirut), Information ‘Manifestations du 10 mai 1945’, 10 May 1945.
- 16 Nantes 93, SGA (Damascus), Information ‘Manifestations anti-françaises du 14.5.1945’, 16 May 1945, and Nantes 2937, Rapport ‘Evolution des relations Franco-Syriennes depuis janvier 1945’, undated, probably June 1945, p. 27.
- 17 Nantes 2937, Rapport ‘Evolution des relations Franco-Syriennes depuis janvier 1945’, undated, probably June 1945, p. 28, Ḥūrānī, *Mudhakkirāt*, pp. 396–7, and Mardam, *Syria*, p. 200.
- 18 Mardam, *Syria*, p. 204, and Juḥā, *Maʿraka – II*, p. 937.
- 19 Mardam, *Syria*, p. 206. For a detailed overview over the events of late May 1945, see Nantes 2937, Rapport ‘Evolution des relations Franco-Syriennes depuis janvier 1945’, undated, probably June 1945, pp. 28–32.
- 20 Nantes 2937, Rapport ‘Evolution des relations Franco-Syriennes depuis janvier 1945’, undated, probably June 1945, p. 28.
- 21 Mardam, *Syria*, p. 209.
- 22 Juḥā, *Maʿraka – II*, p. 941.
- 23 Albord, *Armée française*, p. 288, and Mardam, *Syria*, p. 211.
- 24 Juḥā, *Maʿraka – II*, p. 947.
- 25 Albord, *Armée française*, p. 296, Khoury, *Syria*, p. 616, and Juḥā, *Maʿraka – II*, pp. 948–51.
- 26 A detailed account of these negotiations is provided by N. Kayyālī, *Dirāsa fī tārikh sūriyā al-siyāsī al-muʿāṣir 1920–1950*, Damascus: Dār al-Ṭīlās, 1997, pp. 200–215.
- 27 Juḥā, *Maʿraka – II*, pp. 973–80.

## 7 Conclusion

- 1 R. Khoury, *Modern Arab Thought. Channels of the French Revolution to the Arab East*, Princeton, NJ: Kingston Press, 1983, p. 69.

- 2 K. Murūwa, 'Na'm, al-mufti al-akbar qābala Ḥitlir', *al-Hayāt*, 19 March 1946.
- 3 Following his return to Beirut in early 1945, Murūwa reportedly claimed that he had for a certain time been imprisoned in a German concentration camp cf. CZA S25/4556, 'Letter from Beyrouth', signed 'Avi', 30 May 1945.
- 4 Moubayed, *Steel and Silk. Men and women who shaped Syria 1900–2000*, Seattle, WA: Cune Press, 2006.
- 5 A study of local encounters with Nazi Germany would be incomplete without a reference to former Nazi officials who in the years following the Second World War found refuge in Syria and Lebanon. In this respect, a brief passage in Iskandir al-Riyāshī's memoirs is worth mentioning. According to him, and he does not hide his own dealings with the German sub-commission in Beirut in 1940–41, post-war contacts between protagonists of Arab–German cooperation existed; e.g. Otto von Hentig had visited Kāmil Murūwa in Beirut in 1953, refreshing memories of the war years (I. Riyāshī, *Qabl wa ba'd. 1918–41 – vol. 1*, Beirut: no publisher, 1953, p. 271).
- 6 See, e.g., the preface to a translation of *Mein Kampf* that was published in 1960 by the Lebanese journalist Lūis (Louis) al-Hājj, reproduced in Wild, "'Mein Kampf" in arabischer Übersetzung', *Die Welt des Islams*, 1964, pp. 210–11.

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